

FAREWELL, FRANCE !

An Eye-Witness Account of
Her Tragedy

by

OSCAR PAUL

With a Preface by

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PREFACE

FRANCE went to her doom behind a curtain of silence. During the eight months before her army collapsed, a rigid censorship muted her Press and gagged our correspondents. Thanks to neutral journalists, we knew rather more of what was happening in Germany than of the movement of opinion in France. Some of us were uneasy, for there were facts that could not be hidden. We knew that M. Bonnet was still in office, that the powerful Communist Party had taken its cue from Moscow, and that half the Socialist Party was pacifist and defeatist. But until the crash came, our daily press reassured us. When all was over, this catastrophe was no longer "news", and we were too busy in providing for our own safety to hold an inquest on the dead Republic. To this day few of us are sure whether she died by her own hand, or whether her hereditary enemy overwhelmed her by brute force. Was it military incompetence or class divisions; was it decadence or treason that account for her defeat? Few of us are sure: there is a blank page in our chronicle of contemporary history.

To fill that page is the task Mr. Oscar Paul has undertaken. As the reader will soon discover, his record has all the poignancy of an experience freshly lived. The smell of war invades our

nostrils as we escape with him from Paris: we too are carried over the roads of France in the flood of refugees and share their misery, as they cadge for food and scramble for the scraps of paper that entitled men to safety and survival. But Mr. Paul is not much interested in himself. His narrative is as rapid as it is vivid, and after a few pages, he examines his memory to account for the catastrophe in which he was involved. For this task he has unusual qualifications. There is no need to tell the reader what he will instantly discover for himself. Mr. Paul is a journalist, whose training has taught him both the habit of observing the world around him and the art of writing with grace and power. English is not his mother-tongue, yet he uses it with sure mastery. He had made his home in Paris and had come to understand French life as only a sympathetic foreigner can. He brought with him the clue to the mystery he unravels in this book: France was not the first democratic republic whose crash had overwhelmed him. He is an Austrian, who had watched the overthrow of democracy in Vienna from the Editor's window of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, once the ablest socialist newspaper in Europe. I learned in those days to respect both his courage and the clarity of his thinking. This background of experience must have been in his mind throughout his stay in France. He had seen one Socialist party, his own, go down fighting: he had seen one country, his own, divided and demoralised by the clericalist and propertied

reaction: the heritage fell to Hitler. France at the first glance must have presented a wholly different spectacle, with her proud revolutionary tradition, her liberal middle class, her consciousness of leadership in Europe. But in the end she too went under. It wanted only the corroding touch of Nazi intrigue, to reveal that her revolutionary tradition was anæmic, her political middle class corrupt, and her pride as dead as her glorious past.

There are several ways of dying, and Hitler is an artist in murder, who varies his tools. None the less, an eye-witness who lived through the last days of freedom in Paris and Vienna has a broad basis for his reflections. I am not going to anticipate what Mr. Paul has to tell us, but I will say that his clear narrative, his lively character sketches and his penetrating analysis make a convincing whole. These people, nurtured in the environment he describes, were bound to act as they did act, when the barbarian avalanche struck them. For me, when I had read this book in manuscript, the blank page of history was filled.

That is a sufficient justification for any book. But before the reader reaches the last of these pages, he will thank Mr. Paul for another service. He has given us the material out of which, today and tomorrow, we must frame our policy towards France. This war is a problem in politics as well as in strategy. Neither air-power nor sea-power can win it, unless we know how to approach the

nations involved in it, the neutrals, the enemy, and our submerged allies. We all realise that America and Russia may in the end determine the outcome of our struggle, but the French people, to all appearance helpless and negligible, may affect it hardly less in the last round. When the time for the counter-offensive comes, must we not attempt our landing on their coasts? Through their territory lies the shortest way to the seat of the Power we must overthrow. When we try to imagine this enterprise, one thing at least will be clear to readers of this book. It will not be with the Men of Vichy or with their *Etat Français* that we ought to deal. It has no solidity, nor have they a nation behind them. The epoch of national wars is over; the French nation had lost its moral cohesion before this war broke out. Behind the phantoms of Vichy we must somehow contrive to reach the simple men, the workers and soldiers whose behaviour, as this book records it, is our one foundation for hope.

Let me put the problem concretely. When our expeditionary force lands, and wins for itself a bridgehead, whom will it encounter? It must rally, first of all, the miners of the Pas de Calais. What shall we say to them to induce them to drop their picks, shoulder a rifle, and fall in behind us? Will they respond, if we offer to recognise the venerable Marshal Pétain as their Leader? Would it move them, if we undertook to restore an exact copy of the Republic that led them to defeat, because it dared not trust them?

Will they hand over their destinies to the distinguished soldier who speaks, often, indeed, in noble language, for Free France? Of him they know only that he wrote a book advocating the formation of a professional army. That may not interest miners whose daily lives are not much brighter than they were when Zola described them in *Germinal*. If we hope to rally the French masses, we cannot reach them either by a nationalist or by an imperialist appeal. We must offer them the chance of realising, as they understand these ideals, the Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity which Vichy has erased from the scutcheon of France.

It would not be proper for us to lay down or even to suggest a programme or a form of constitution: that the French must do for themselves, when with our help their land is freed. But some degree of responsibility we cannot evade. The course and character of the war of liberation will be determined by the Frenchmen whom we welcome as our collaborators and comrades. It will succeed, if we can first win the men who have the confidence of the masses and of youth. Some of them we may have to liberate from prison. Some of them we may discover working underground to keep alive the memory of trade-unionist solidarity. Some may spontaneously seek us out.

The reader who has watched authority at work on similar problems will read this forecast with some anxiety. Braving the German pickets, a French miners' leader contrives to make his way

to our headquarters with a plan for action. How should we receive him? I do not know, but I know what we did with leaders of the German workers, when they found their way to our shores. We interned them.

I began this book with a keen curiosity about France: as I closed it, I asked myself some questions about England. For on us and our rulers the immediate future of the French people may depend. Once before our ancestors faced the task that may confront us tomorrow. They restored what could not live. Our ruling class will not attempt to revive the monarchy, but it may try to restore the corrupt society that broke at Sedan. This clear-sighted book points to another course.

H. N. BRAILSFORD.

INTRODUCTION

THE France of the Rights of Man is dead. In six weeks Hitler smashed and strangled the country in which one half of modern democracy was born. This closes a chapter of history: the France we all loved, because we associated her with a great step forward in human liberty, is dead, and will never come to life again. It is the end of an epoch, as well as the end of a myth.

At this grave we are all mourners; all who love freedom. Let us bow respectfully as well as regretfully. Let there be no stone-throwing at a victim prostrate under the heel of a merciless invader. But let the truth be spoken plainly. The author of this book feels himself an impartial observer; for, though no Frenchman himself, he has lived in France and dearly loved the French people. Above all, he loves the cause for which France stood—stood feebly, alas! and fell.

The world at large is slow in realising how great this fall has been. Nor have the French people themselves yet measured the depth of their defeat. In fact, their lack of

comprehension for the extent of the disaster that had befallen them was one of the strangest features of the troubled period that followed the armistice. Gradually and with varying reactions they will wake up to the fate that confronts them today.

He had a clear grasp of reality, the official at the préfecture in M. who replied to the entreaties of a refugee: "Don't appeal to the honour of France. There is no such thing any more. This is Germany now: *nous deviendrons tous des boches* (we shall all become boches)."

Whoever wants to save from this fate the rest of France and the rest of the world is a welcome reader.

THE AUTHOR PUTS IN A WORD

How I came to write this book is in itself a story in several chapters. I shall not pose as the hero of any one of them. My escape from the inferno which France had become was lucky all round. I shall not boast of wounds I have not received. I am content to put in a personal word of explanation.

We had decided to remain in Paris as long as possible, but to avoid falling into German hands. Most of our friends had already left. My wife and I passed a quiet Sunday afternoon; I was writing an article, still hoping against hope that next week's issue of my journal would be able to appear. Later in the day a friend came: he had been at some important government office, he said, and had just seen the last official bolt the door. They were all gone; there was nothing to do but to leave also.

We went out into the street. It was an unusually quiet evening, and something indescribably oppressive hung in the air: fear. I had seen Paris in many an exciting moment, and had always admired the calm

of the people. This time it was different: terror strode through the streets, a tiger with silent but clutching claws.

My wife, usually so quiet but always active and plucky when it comes to a crisis, took the situation in hand. There were no taxis to be found anywhere, and scores of people, luggage in hand, stood waiting and waving on the pavement. She succeeded in getting a taxi, and went off to the station. There was a throng of cars, about a mile long, filling the wide approach to the station yard, and this stream moved with maddening slowness, rolling and twisting like a giant snail and covering about a hundred yards in a quarter of an hour. The yard and the hall were packed; she managed nevertheless to get tickets. She went back and contrived to dig out in one of the yards of old Montmartre, where time is forgotten, a driver who promised to fetch us at 4.30 a.m. next morning. Our train was due to leave at about 8 o'clock.

It was nearly midnight when we started our hasty packing: our beloved flat was in an awful mess, but we tried to snatch a little sleep. There was A.A. fire and the occasional thud of explosions throughout the night. At about 2 a.m. a strange smell

became noticeable, as if something was burning in the neighbourhood. At first we failed to locate it, but later we learned where it came from: the rapidly advancing Germans or the retreating French army had fired a town not thirty miles away. The deadly smell of war invaded Paris.

I shall never forget that drive through the empty streets of Paris at daybreak. Policemen in twos, occasionally civilians with armlets and shouldered rifles, stood on guard; here and there obstacles had been hastily put up in the streets to meet incoming German tanks. The smoky smell now hung deep over all the northern half of the city. A last look at the Louvre silhouetted nobly against the rising dawn: that was our farewell to Paris.

We passed near the old house on the bank of the Seine where I had often been received by Léon Blum in his study, the high walls plastered with rows of books and the high windows looking out on the mellowing mists of the river. There he would sit, a slim, imposing figure, his fingers sometimes sliding through his drooping grey moustache, his eyes alert, following your thoughts before you had finished a sentence; underlining his replies sometimes with a smile and sometimes with a nervous and delicate gesture, and treating

his friends with a mixture of affection and aloofness. I tried to recall the friendly figure while we passed: where would he be now? . . . At the time I write these words, he is a prisoner in the hands of the men of Vichy.

We got away luckily, the train even leaving on time. Immediately afterwards, we learned later, things had gone much worse. The doors of the station were closed; the trains left at random, and it was a matter of pure chance whether you got into one of them; it even happened that they were hardly full.

At the same time, on all the roads leading from Paris to the south and south-west began an epic of endless misery. The people of Belgium and Northern France had already been streaming southwards for many days, as the Germans advanced; now the exodus from Paris, adding millions to the flood and multiplying its horrors, made it the drama of a nation in flight.

I have spoken to many a friend who has been right in it; to men and women from every walk of life who have been through it all; who have spent two weeks covering a distance which was no more than eight hours' train-run in normal times. I have

seen children pushed in prams for days on end through the hellish nightmare.

Most of the people started by car, many on bicycles, and later, when the rich had left and even the working quarters got on the move, people set out walking and begging for a lift. Men from factories were packed on lorries; some had their womenfolk with them, some had hastily left the workshop in their blue overalls; some lorries carried machinery, hurriedly dismantled. But a great many of these vehicles never got anywhere at all. Lorries broke down; cars ran out of petrol and had to be abandoned or were left in panic when the German bombers roared overhead; bicycles were stolen in this run for life; and some people simply found they could get on-quicker by merely trusting their feet.

The column moved on with deadly slowness. A broken-down lorry would create a frightful jam and a stoppage of many hours. A bridge ahead which had been hit or destroyed would mean a hold-up which cost up to a full day's delay. Most dreaded of all were the crossings of the big rivers which all flow from east to west in this part of France, forming so many obstacles to the flight heading southwards.

One of my friends passed the only remaining bridge over the Loire at Orleans while the German 'planes were machine-gunning the vehicles stuck on it; he escaped by crouching underneath the big lorries.

And all the time the Germans were behind them. And all the time those hundreds of thousands of people, men, women and children, got little to eat, and had to sleep in their cars or in the barns by the roadside, always running the risk of falling far behind if they rested. And all the time they knew nothing of what was happening beyond their range of vision; they might occasionally pick up an old newspaper or a distorted piece of news which someone pretended to have heard on the wireless. And all the time gruelling, terror-spreading rumours flew with them.

They passed through deserted villages and through others which people abandoned to join in the flight. They would pass farms where un milked cows mooed with pain and sheep and swine and poultry would run into the road, creating confusion, to be chased and eaten or simply run over. They saw the crops standing ripe waiting for the reaper who never came. And they saw corpses lying by the roadside or in abandoned cars. And the column moved on.

Then, from behind, they got mixed up with the retreating French army. This brought the chaos to a climax. Some of the mechanised units would steam-roller through the throng; others would be swallowed up by the stream. I have been told of scenes where German tanks and motor-cyclists, French military lorries and fleeing civilians were mixed up in an inextricable confusion. The French soldiers in general were kind and helpful. They took the fugitives on their lorries, fed them with full hands, helped them with petrol. And out of this drifting mass of débris from the war where the seasoned soldier huddled beside the wretched refugee, filling the roads and plains of doomed France, there arose one cry: "We have been betrayed!"

This is the first chapter of the story that this book has to tell. It is written to echo this cry and to explain it.

But there is another chapter to go with it. Amongst the millions who drifted to the south of France there were Frenchmen, Belgians and Dutch; but there were also refugees of many other nations who had previously fled from Hitler and dictatorship in their own country. Poles, Czechs, Italians, Spaniards, German and Austrian anti-Nazis

and Jews had found an asylum in what was once a land of liberty. For these people this was their second flight. A third was to follow.

They now crowded into what became, after the armistice had been concluded, the non-occupied territory. I shall relate later what happened to those who could not get there in time but fell into German hands. Seven to eight million men, not counting the army, were thrust upon a region which normally accommodated about one third of the French population and had already at the beginning of the war accepted the bulk of the refugees from the war zone. There they crammed the towns and camped on the roads. They were hospitably received by the local population, but the most charitable good-will was not sufficient to cope with the emergency. Transport was at a standstill; food-stocks were rapidly emptied, and no fresh supplies were forthcoming. The complete disorganisation of the defeated country increased the calamity.

Most difficult of all was the plight of the foreigners. I shall not describe in detail their sorry case and how they felt about it. A nation, like a man, is apt to become egoistic in distress: France, too, grew heartless. Drained of all her resources, driven to adapt

her political system to that of her victor, in the vain hope of winning his mercy, she turned not only on her own loyal defenders, but also on her friends. Reaction raised an outcry against the aliens. Bureaucrats who feared for their careers and bowed before their new masters turned a deaf ear to human needs and all considerations of honour. Under the urge of fear France became hell to those who hated Hitler.

And then another flight set in: the flight out of France.

At first, when the great flood reached the southern frontiers of France, little waves had already swept over the border in panic. But this was soon stopped; the Spanish frontier was closed. For hundreds of thousands of foreigners who had assembled in Southern France weeks passed in anxious waiting, and life, besides the scramble for food, meant no more than listening to rumours which became daily more distressing. I had been lucky in bringing with me a little wireless set: every morning and every night I heard the bulletin from London and tried my best to spread the news. But my information could not compete with the surging, roaring waves of rumour, nor still the anxiety of my friends.

We felt ourselves prisoners waiting for the day when a concentration camp would grip us and enclose us within barbed wire. To leave France was the only hope of tens of thousands. To obtain a foreign visa became a matter of life and death. Curious devices were found to get near a foreign consulate, as all aliens in France were forbidden to leave their residence. More curious devices still were employed to come into possession of the much-coveted permit to go abroad.

True, it was not always the best who succeeded. The reckless rich were able to buy freedom like a high-priced commodity, as they had been used to buy the other good things of life. The cunning got through, regardless of everything but their own interest. The better types were often left stranded and helpless.

Somehow, we too managed to get out. Political enmity, muddle and corruption followed us right up to the last step; human kindness helped us over the frontier. At last I stood on Lisbon pier, in the last corner of Europe, waving good-bye to my friends who sailed for America.

I decided not to leave Europe, but to go where Europe's freedom and future are still defended by free men. I decided to go to England and to tell this tale.

CHAPTER ONE : BACKGROUND

PAST GLORY

FRANCE was the first country on the European continent to do away with her king and her landlords and to give freedom to her citizens. For half a century the French Revolution kept marching on : the history of Europe was shaped by the struggle between the ideas of 1789 and the old autocracies. During a century France was the champion of a new order, its standard-bearer, its model and its pride.

Through many a political reverse, yet in an unbroken line of progress, France reached, towards the end of the 19th century, the heights of bourgeois liberal civilisation. This was the land where men were free and women wont to be loved. Here one found the freest minds, strong in reason and in wit, yet submitting to *l'esprit des lois*. Here lived the greatest artists of their time, and from all parts of the world would-be geniuses flocked to the City of Light to share in the glories of Montmartre and Montparnasse. For more than two generations Paris was the Mecca of art and cultured taste. Its manners and its

modes set the model to the whole world. Its fashions were accepted by all, and its fancies adored; the caprice of the Grands Boulevards made the law. Laurels were lavishly showered on its writers and painters, its actors and singers, and with greater reverence still on its cooks; and this fame, France felt, could never die.

Here she stood, the centre of 19th-century love of life, her *esprit* shining over the earth—and here she remained. Other countries—Britain and Germany and Scandinavia—took great strides and overtook her in many directions, but France paid no heed. She still took pride in her glory, as if it were indelible. She still believed herself to be what she once had been.

Central heating was introduced into delightful 18th-century "*hôtels*" (noblemen's houses) and into the spurious palaces overloaded with gorgeous shams that had sprung up in the hey-day of capitalism, when fortunes were quickly made; the radiator did not fit and, often, did not even work. Meanwhile, the middle-classes remained housed in old and uncomfortable buildings and the workers in slums. There is less modern architecture in and around Paris (even if there are new houses) than in any

other great city of the world; and the French provincial town is as yet untouched in its time-honoured beauty and its complete lack of sanitary arrangements. There is no other city in the world (not counting Russia) where more than one-third of all wage-earning men and women live in hideous little "*chambres meublées*" (furnished rooms), with no other comfort than a gas-ring. There is no other country where the average type of water-closet is without a seat. Modern technical science did not penetrate French life; neither did sports nor physical education. Even the charm of Parisian women, according to modern standards of health and beauty, is a myth.

A great country living on its past; we all loved it for what it pretended still to represent. In its public proclamations it still spoke the language of Rousseau and Robespierre. Speeches in Parliament or a resolution passed by some obscure municipal council, or even the election manifesto of a third-rate candidate: you could not fail to hear in them a faint rumbling of the historic drums of the Convention. The French official language, like any other expression of French intellectual life, has remained on the heights of fifty years ago.

So did French literary art. It remained on its pedestal, and treated with infinite refinement the problems of yesterday. There is hardly a modern French author in the sense of one who had strength enough to reach beyond the subtle reflections of the individual or the eternal conflicts of people in love: conflicts within one's own sensitive self, conflicts in the sphere of surfeited, snobbish and sophisticated sex. The Great War created a diversion, but it did not last. French art reverted to the expression of the suffering of highbrow souls for highbrow salons, tedious and false, while at the same time it treated the masses to stupid vaudevilles and an endless stream of vulgar songs. Completely commercialised, it was prone to every form of corruption. The French cinema, despite some outstanding achievements, was conspicuous for its waste of talent. The French Press was known to be the vilest of any civilised country, and the proof it was to give, during and after the war, of its lack of moral qualities was appalling.

French education still stuck to Racine and punctilious grammar; it culminated in the Académie Française, that most reactionary of all French institutions which the old bureaucrats of *l'esprit*, those senile heirs of

Voltaire and Carnot, had made a laughing-stock even for bourgeois wits.

Even in such quarters of social life as sports—for instance, football—a crooked professionalism had developed before the country had passed through the stage of genuine interest in mass-recreation. In every field the 20th century seemed a hotbed-growth strangely contrasting with the traditional forms of 19th-century culture which France had preserved.

But the spirit had gone out of it all. The Rights of Man had been buried under an appalling overgrowth of bureaucracy, a stifling mechanism as inefficient as it was callous. I had a glimpse of it when, shortly before the outbreak of war, a poster was put up in every Paris house announcing the arrangements for the distribution of gas-masks. It said, still in the language of Rousseau, that foreigners need not apply: they were simply to die unprotected. It is only just, however, to add that later there proved to be enough gaps in the administrative machinery for many foreigners to get their masks. Innumerable experiences confirmed this impression: the individual civil servant, especially in the lower ranks, was as friendly and helpful as any Frenchman.

The administration was cumbersome, musty and altogether rotten.

What finally remained from the Rights of Man was the sacred liberty of any Frenchman to eat, dress and behave as he pleases, to kiss his girl before all eyes in the *Métro*, and not to be asked by the police with whom he had slept last night. The ease of the body went before the freedom of the mind.

When I came to Paris I took a flat at Montmartre, right on the steps which ascend to the white glory of the basilica du Sacré-Coeur. Around me stretched the realm of past glory. There were a few remnants of old houses, and old people would tell you of the times when most of these houses were thatched and wine grown in the neighbourhood (there is still one solitary vineyard kept on show) was served in open-air inns on the wayside. There were still some delightful corners, some lilac blossoming in little yards, mere ghosts of former gardens where no one sits any more. Today all the picturesque "*boîtes*" of Montmartre where Mimi Pinson went to dance have become mere painted wings for sight-seeing and tourist traffic. Highly coloured yet dusty with age, they attract British and American visitors who submit, more or less gaily, to a

process of intense and shameless robbery. There were also a few residents left over from the former artist colony, some of them British, descendants of the joyous crowd that partook of Montmartre's glories, miseries and revelling delights; but by the time I got to know them they had all become respectable petty-bourgeois, even if they had kept some of their artistic appearance.

I got to like them, with the other people of Montmartre, the common people, the laundress, and the grocer, and the taxi-driver's wife, and the concierge. I lived with them through most of the war, through air-raid alarms and the days of bad news. They were mostly kind-hearted, intelligent, well-mannered and extremely well-spoken. Later I came to know the peasants of Southern France; and I have never met a more lovable lot than this solid race of laborious, well-bred and hospitable people. These are the gifts which a century and a half of freedom have bestowed upon the French people—and they will not be lost even under German domination.

RULING RENTIERS

How did it happen that the people of France ingloriously fell under a foreign

domination which they had not deserved?

When, many months ago, a friend of mine asked me about the situation in France I replied: "A bourgeois society in decay." He laughed at me. "Another of your Left-Wing stock-in-trade expressions!"

Alas, I have not been enough of a Left-Wing Cato. Seeing France's ruling classes rotten to the core, I realised how dangerous it was for a decaying system to be forced into waging war. I thought it possible, however, that this decay might leave the military organisation unimpaired, that a rotting system of society could still preserve an efficient army—the glorious French army of Verdun fame! I was wrong. The rot had eaten through it all.

France has remained just as much behind in industrial development as in any other field. The small workshop still predominates in industry, and apart from a few big plants, the average factory is very backward in technical equipment. Many an old shed carries on in France that would have been closed long ago by the factory inspectors in any other country on account of unhealthy and dangerous conditions.

While industry lagged behind, finance got

l. It grew up in big banks. It threw work of credit and saving-institutions the whole country. It caught up in it individual and every class, down to the best craftsmen and the small farmers. And them with fine ropes to its Stock exchange manoeuvres and speculations. The man in France is a gambler as much as ever.

France also went out to build the French empire: it is knit together by invested money, shares and banking-sheets. The French capitalist does not export industrial products, but capital. He draws interest from the exploitation of colonial riches and from the labour, not as industrial employer, mainly as purveyor of money.

His ideal is a boss' life without the adventurous risk of the explorer or the steady effort of the industrialist. His father or grandfather may have been the one or the other; the son sits back in his chair, cutting coupons. The Frenchman is no idler: much scientists, engineers, even shopkeepers are hard-working people. But he tends to prefer safety and an easy life. He wants to be a rentier.

In fact, the French bourgeoisie is not a class of captains of industry. It is a class

of interest-drawing, money-loving rentiers. They have been liberal by tradition as far as politics go; they are savagely conservative, brutally reactionary where money is concerned. They have got the rentier's mind. They do not want to live dangerously: they want to possess and to conserve. They did not want to go to war: they wanted to dine well and in peace.

This rentier's spirit emanating from the ruling classes permeates the entire society. There is no other country where the Civil Service—very badly paid and giving poor service for poor pay—is so much sought for as a kind of insurance guaranteeing a small but fixed income and a pension, the gilt-edged security of the have-nots. The French craftsman or shopkeeper will work his head off during part of his life so that he may buy a little house later and go angling the rest of his days. Even the working class is affected: allured by the habits of the rich, it is accessible to their morals.

A friend of mine, a great Hungarian journalist who does not speak a single word of French but who has a keen eye for the little things of life that betray the great trends of human history, said to me one day when he had been only a short time

in France: "There is too much apéritif-drinking it seems to me. I wonder how France will fare in a war." ("Apéritif" is the common name for a score of multi-coloured and multi-flavoured drinks which are consumed at any hour of the day to "open up" the appetite.) He was tragically right. Those drinks proved deadly.

With the ruling classes in their rentier's attitude and the rest more or less following their example, France was put to the grim test of war. For the ruling class in any democratic country facing the times in which we live there are two courses open. It may stand up to the menace of Fascist imperialism threatening to reshape the map of the earth by violence and aggression. It may fight to preserve its own national inheritance, frontiers, colonies and all; but if it fights it cannot do it alone. It has to rely on the forces of the whole nation, it has to call upon all classes, it has to appeal above all to the working class. Or else it may try to come to terms with the threatening aggressor, appease him, strike a bargain with him—so as to avoid any shock to the social structure, any war, any dangerous experiments, any loss of privileges. Both tendencies are to be found to-day within

the ruling class of any given country. The one will defend itself against Fascism because it is at the same time the aggressive imperialism of a foreign nation. The other will give itself up to Fascism because it is at the same time a possible ally, an agency to be called in against social disturbances. In short, the one will go with the workers against Fascism; the other with Fascism against the workers.

In France, this choice was at first shunned. In France, during eight months there was a half-hearted, half-way muddle. The Fifth Column, reaching high up, worked smoothly under the surface. The little dictatorship of that little man, Daladier, kept the workers at bay. The shock of the German onslaught brought a change; but it was already too late. When Reynaud took over, the battle of Belgium was about to begin.

For a moment France pulled herself together. Dunkirk brought moral relief. But when the German tanks smashed their way ahead, swept down the coast and pushed on to the south, the French officers, sons of the bourgeoisie, were the first to run away. Still it was not the people, stunned by the shock as it was, that clamoured for peace: it was the generals who

proposed to ask for an armistice. The capitulation came from the top. No desperate, no devastated country writhing under the knock-out blow forced it upon reluctant leaders. It was the ruling rentiers who did it. A worn-out system which had lost the will to live threw itself on the mercy of the invader.

These rentiers had been stirred out of their comfort. Their cars had stuck on wrecked bridges while they fled from Paris; some of them had had to run for their lives. Their officer-sons, when hell broke loose, had lost the comfort of the soft beds, good meals and lovely ladies whose company they had enjoyed during eight months of "phoney war". The sword does not fit a rentier; they laid it down. They submitted to the foreign yoke so as to be allowed to return home and draw a dividend again—even if it should be a smaller one. They undertook to make the French workers hew wood and draw water for the foreign overlord, and contented themselves with the reward of Pharaoh's overseers.

France has lost this war because her ruling rentiers dreaded the loss of their privileges more than the loss of their country. They were more afraid of the social consequences which a loosening of mass-forces could entail

than of the national consequences of defeat. They hated Léon Blum more than they feared Hitler.

Thus a nation was defeated because it had not the courage to rouse the people to a real fight for freedom. A system went under, its own strength exhausted, because it did not dare to draw fresh vigour from the masses. Bourgeois democracy met its doom because it had not been able or willing to regenerate its dwindling life from the rising forces of society.

Finie, la France. Here goes the French Empire. Here lies national pride. *La gloire* is gone. *La patrie* is dead. The rentiers are safe.

But they are safe only for to-day.

LABOUR'S WEAKNESS

Could France have been saved if the working class could have thrown in its full weight? We shall see later what chances there were. But was there any one ready to seize such a chance at all? It must be said at the outset: French Labour was no more prepared to save the nation than the ruling classes were prepared to stand down and let it try. It had neither strength enough nor the will to use it.

It was weakened by its divisions. The

Communists were utterly confused and discredited by their incredible "about turn" of policy following the Hitler-Stalin pact. The Socialist Party was rent from top to bottom by a deep cleavage connected with their attitude towards the war; as the two factions were hardly on speaking terms, they found it difficult to preserve even the appearance of a single party. The Trade Unions had been severely hit by the failure of the General Strike of 1938 and the repressive measures which it entailed. Thus the French workers faced the war in a posture of retreat and in no mood for marching ahead. They felt no call to fight, any more than their masters—as they should have done. Only a small section realised the true meaning of this war, if indeed it was to be a real fight against Fascism.

The French Labour Movement had been split by the Communists in 1920. Since then most of its energy had been spent in internal quarrels, in the changing array of forces within its own ranks. At the time of the split the Communists swept the board, taking with them the great Paris daily *l'Humanité*, founded by Jean Jaurès, as well as three-quarters of the membership. But soon the tide ebbed back; and after innumerable

blunders the Communists found themselves largely surpassed by the Socialists in political influence, voting strength and even in numbers. Then, in 1934, the turning tide in Moscow brought the question of the "United Front" to the fore. The Communists seized the new instrument of unity just as unscrupulously as they had handled the old one of vilification; this gave them a certain advantage over their more hesitating opponents, whom they tried with all their skill to convert into their allies.

When in 1935 the French Trade Unions reunited, there were some 650,000 members in the C.G.T. (*Confédération Générale du Travail*, the French T.U.C.) led by Léon Jouhaux, while the Moscow Unions (*Confédération du Travail Unitaire*, C.G.T.U.) had hardly 200,000 left. The fusion brought an immediate revival, and the subsequent era of the Popular Front sent the membership figures soaring sky-high. Unions even in skilled trades like the engineers who, previously, had a few thousand members in the whole of the Paris industrial area, saw their membership rise overnight to six and seven figures. Membership of the reorganised C.G.T. reached its peak somewhere near the five million mark, but rapidly receded again

in later months. Its meteoric rise and decline was closely bound up with the fate of the Popular Front; and there is no denying the fact that the first—if deceptive—move towards unity within the French working class brought about its first big advance since 1918.

Inside the Trade Union movement, however, unification had been immediately followed by a strong drive on the part of the Communists to gain control of the new organisation. They set about it with reckless cunning, making outward concessions, while they put their men into one key-post after another. They were strongly helped by the fact that, naturally, the majority of members now consisted of very raw recruits who had no respect for the merits of old organisers (although these had often given a lifetime's service to the cause at a time when things were difficult) and who fell an easy prey to the Communist methods of "higher bidding". By constant pressure the Communists were able to gain substantial results: one after another the old local leaders were removed, one after another the reorganised Unions fell into their hands.

This campaign of Communist "colonisation" (as it was called by their opponents)

soon led to counter-moves and a bitter struggle which passed beyond the closed doors of committee rooms and aroused a good deal of publicity. There is an important connection between this struggle and the attitude of French Labour towards the war; for one of the main lines of attack against the Communists was that they were guilty, at Moscow's bidding, of "pushing the French workers into war". Most unfortunately, during all the ensuing squabbles this connection remained and obscured the real issue: "peace" became a stick with which to knock your Communist on the head. When, finally, the Communists shirked and broke out (thus revealing the fallacy of this argument), this merely added to the confusion.

The anti-Communists within the Trade Unions consisted of two groups. The leaders of the old school (like the veteran Georges Dumoulin) harped on the traditional independence of French trade-unionism—it must owe no allegiance to any political party. The younger men were of a different type, and belonged to a different school. There was nothing traditional about the views they held; their trade-unionist outlook was mixed with modern "planist", "corpora-

tive " and " neo-socialist " ideas, all leading gently and sideways up the Fascist road. Their most prominent men were René Belin, the highly intelligent editor of the weekly paper *Syndicats*, and the secretary of the Building Operatives' Union, Raymond Froideval—both to-day in official positions at Vichy, Belin as Minister of Labour in the Pétain Government and Froideval as his *chef de cabinet* (something like the Parliamentary Private Secretary in Britain). The group round *Syndicats* was thus held together first by anti-Communism, but at the same time by a violent hatred of all whom it denounced as war-mongers: a spiteful feeling that respected none of the decencies, turned comrades into bitter opponents and drove them to make friends with the enemy. In fact, it was hardly a secret that, at a later stage, there existed close relations between Belin and Bonnet, the Foreign Minister of " appeasement " and preconceived defeat.

The experiences of " unity " within the Trade Unions reacted upon the political parties; any move towards a closer knitting of the " United Front " was soon discouraged. It was the Communists who first spoiled the honeymoon of the People's Front, by refusing to join the Blum Govern-

ment and staying outside to criticise; after that, all ardour chilled, the Socialists became very unwilling partners. Here again legitimate anxiety to preserve the independence of their own party mingled with much less respectable feelings, and "Peace" became a war-cry in the internal party squabble. Straining at the leash of Communist domination, many Socialists got entangled and fell into the Pacifist trap.

But whatever its motives, the opposition against dealings with the Communists was proved right by later events—as even those who had taken another line were reluctantly forced to admit. Indeed, when the new big *volte-face* came; when the Communist leaders who had thundered against Hitler piteously ate their words, because Stalin had signed a pact with him; when their writers who had denounced—with how much force and conviction—the half-hearted treachery of French official policy changed their tune overnight: what a nauseating experience! Even the hard-boiled political observer who had known something of Communist dishonesty before was shocked to see so much fire dissipated into hot air, while convictions were dishonoured and the trust of the rank and file shamelessly betrayed.

In no other country could this sudden change create so much of a stir. For in no other country did the Communists represent so large a section of the working class; nowhere else (except, of course, in Russia) had they wielded such an influence in politics, or come so near to governmental responsibility. Moreover, in France, the Franco-Russian Pact had for years been a kind of touchstone in politics. I well remember the morning when the news of the Hitler-Stalin Agreement came through: how the little cafés seethed with excitement and how some of the Parisian workers sat stunned and speechless, while others flung themselves into violent anti-bolshevik tirades: "Russia has let us down". And nowhere else, in the period preceding the coup, had the Communists increased their hold on the masses by such unscrupulous methods of entirely uncommunist, blatantly nationalist propaganda.

In fact, their patriotic antics had been disgusting to watch. When they embarked upon their United Front tactics they had been ordered to behave nicely towards everybody who could be enticed to join in the chorus, and the farther away this somebody stood the better. Innumerable committees were formed with brilliant bourgeois names

on their lists of sponsors; while bright young intellectuals would pop up as innocent-looking secretaries keeping the ropes in their hands; and no one would own up to being a Communist, but they would just be good democrats, all of them. Naturally, they preferred the unsuspecting bourgeois to the Socialist who had some political experience; and the more reactionary this bourgeois was the more they tried not to hurt his feelings. Particularly noticeable was their effort to "extend a brotherly hand" to the Roman Catholics, thus breaking with a very strong and deeply-rooted tradition of the entire French Left; they went to great lengths, yet failed to win the Catholics over. But again the more they kept aloof, the more the Communists seemed to crave for their favour. I remember a significant little incident, quite unimportant in itself, yet highly indicative. One day all the Paris papers carried a story about a nun having ill-treated a child in her care; the Communist *l'Humanité* also had the story, but it was the only paper which failed to inform its readers that the culprit was a nun!

At the same time there was no end of tri-colour flag-waving, of appeals to make France "free, strong and happy", of organisations that dropped their formerly revolutionary

names and slogans and became "The young girls of France" or the like, of posters exalting the happiness of home and sweet family life. The Communists, whether it was all camouflage or not, had gone nationalist.

With all this humbug they were, in Paris at least, a real party of the masses, far more like the Social-Democratic parties of Central Europe, with their strict discipline, than the loose organisations which had grown up on France's individualistic soil. Their leader, Maurice Thorez, was a big guy, as jolly and fond of life as he was vulgar. There was always a hullabaloo around their meetings.

As to their policy, I shall certainly not blame them for what they said after Munich, when they denounced the illusions of "appeasement" and warned the world of Hitler's lust for war. The articles by Gabriel Péri in *l'Humanité* on foreign policy were damning, devastating demonstrations of Bonnet's treachery—only they turned out later to constitute an equally severe condemnation of their own author . . . when those who had denounced Fascism became its allies.

Even after the Hitler-Stalin Pact, even after Germany had attacked Poland, the French Communists for a few days continued to protest their loyalty. On September 1st,

1939, their Parliamentary group, speaking for the Party, declared that the Communists would be found in the front rank of the fight against Hitlerism. That was before the new order from Moscow reached them. The next day they discovered that this was an "imperialist war"; they had not known it before. Thorez and some of their most prominent leaders bolted; others, mainly small fry, were arrested.

The repercussion was tremendous. Just as, a few months before, it had been a fashion that every snob salon must have its communist to be "*chic*", the most violent anti-bolshevism was now let loose. Vindictive, vulgar reaction appeared justified. Stalin's treachery played into the hands of the most dangerous traitors.

Soon the anti-Communist campaign degenerated into a wave of repression directed against the workers as a whole. It was an orgy of class-hatred, blindness and blunders. Had *l'Humanité* been allowed to appear it would have been no end of a job to explain the inexplicable change in the Communist attitude; but the paper was suppressed. Had the Communists been forced to stand cross-examination before public opinion they would have been hard put to it, and

their self-exposure could not but have ended in a pitiable climb-down; but the party was banned. They were thus spared a good many troubles, and it was not long before they recovered a faint halo of martyrdom for suffering persecution at the hands of a Government whose popularity soon began to wane. By these methods Daladier, who was out to destroy the Communists, in fact saved them. If ever there should be a Communist come-back in France, they will owe it to the short-sightedness of their opponents.

This was another element which unhappily influenced the situation. Just as, before the war, the Communists had wrongly come to be associated with a policy of resistance to Hitler, which was thereby discredited, now the opposition against the war as it was conducted by an inert and inefficient clique of shirkers appeared to be somehow bound up with the Communists: an inextricable confusion which totally obscured the issue. This was one of the roots of Labour's tragic weakness.

LÉON BLUM AND HIS PARTY

It would have been up to the Socialists to clear up this maze of misunderstandings and give the workers of France a clear and

unmistakable lead. Unfortunately they were far from equal to this task.

The history of French Socialism goes back to the beginnings of the 19th century. It had been born a younger brother to democracy. It had fought on the barricades of four revolutions. It had died a dozen deaths from execution-squads, precocity, internal strife, and had been always reborn. From a century of varied and often stormy adventures it had emerged, at the beginning of the 20th century, a rising movement under a great leader: Jean Jaurès. This peasant's son and professor, squat and slovenly, was a genius in expressing the simple man's mind in the noble language of a great people's soul.

Jaurès was murdered to make room for war: on July 31st, 1914, he fell, its first victim, under the bullets of a villain (it was a strange whim of fate that Villain was in fact the murderer's name). During the Great War, while old leaders like Jules Guesde, Edouard Vaillant, Marcel Sembat were losing their grip on life, and the younger ones, like Pierre Renaudel and Jean Longuet, fought the battles of the day, a disciple and personal friend of Jaurès gradually and shyly moved into the limelight: Léon Blum.

Coming from a Jewish family, he was bred amongst all the riches of French intellectual life and is deeply imbued with the culture of his country; he will die if its present eclipse should become permanent. He took to the law and became a legal expert of high standing. He started writing as a literary critic, and his reviews made him a reputation. He was conversant with modern philosophy, and one of his early books was "On matrimony", putting forward the idea of marriage on probation. He became a Socialist through his lofty sense of justice, applying it to the miseries and conflicts of mankind and generalising his own high moral standards.

He is indeed a great moral personality, one of the finest characters to be found amongst political leaders. The movement of his tall, slim body is nervous yet graceful; his delicate health is a counterfoil to his delicate feelings. Never has a stronger brain been tied to a more sensitive nervous system. I have seen him cry at meetings; and there was nothing shocking about this weeping man. He wins intellectual admiration and personal affection; but he is no leader of men and masses. He is not strong enough for that, and maybe he is, in all

his kindness, too exacting. He has never written an article in which he did not appeal to the noblest of human feelings; this clarity of mind and purity of purpose, because they make people feel small in his presence, make them think him superior; at last they hate him for being the better man. There is no pat-on-the-back manner about him, no electioneering. He knows nothing about canvassing, winning popularity, grouping your friends; the more robust sides of political work are not in his line, they even escape his consideration. If he is hit, he is too noble to hit back. There is no one, either inside or outside his party, to match him in force of argument; but he can easily be put out by a mean intrigue or a show of brutality. Yet he is a man of great personal courage, and he has proved it in the face of adversity, before booing masses as well as in meeting physical assault.

Under his leadership French Socialism, after parting with the Communists, had retained or regained a world-wide reputation. In Léon Blum the intellectual and moral greatness of the outgoing democratic era found a last and admirable embodiment. Democratic Socialism had evolved as the

heir of the traditions of liberalism. It cherished all the values which bourgeois democracy in its decay was about to abandon. In France, moreover, it had been nurtured by the memories of the Great Revolution. Its inheritance of ideals was derived from Rousseau rather than from Karl Marx. Blum also followed Jaurès in that he was no Marxist. Even when he talked economics he remained a teacher of morals. With a profound knowledge of modern history, he sometimes misread contemporary events. The monstrosity of Fascism he failed to grasp in its international aspects because, for a long time, he judged it from a moral point of view only. The monstrosity of a modern war he thought for a long time impossible.

But when war drew nearer, Léon Blum resolutely faced it. He had accepted Munich (as he publicly wrote) "with a cowardly feeling of comfort mingled with shame"; he now became the head of the anti-Munich section of his party. He devoted his daily articles in the *Populaire* to prepare his public for the inevitable. He said "yes" to the fight against Hitler and he said "yes" to the war when it came. But hampered by the strong divergence

within his party, hampered also by statesmanlike considerations, he accepted the war as it was then conducted by impotent rulers; reluctantly, it is true, yet without offering a resolute alternative. He did not rouse the workers to that "ideological war" against Fascism of which the ruling classes were afraid but which would have stimulated the people to fight for its liberty. He fought Hitler as the rulers of France would have it: as the hereditary foe of the country, not as the murderous arch-enemy of the workers of the world. He led the French workers into fighting in their rulers' wake.

He was bitterly opposed by Paul Faure, the Socialist Party's general secretary, who led the "Munichois", the anti-war section. Paul Faure had been a good, if commonplace, orator in his time and a good organiser; he had grown lazy and comfort-loving, but had retained that easy-going manner which readily wins friends. His pacifism was a mixture of traditional socialist arguments dating from the last war and a petty-bourgeois anxiety to save one's life and family and comfort. If Léon Blum appealed to reason and lofty ideals, Paul Faure's appeal was directed to those feelings which are very human in an earthly sense. He

wanted people to maintain peace and preserve the amenities of life. One of his followers made this painfully clear when, addressing a conference, he used the phrase: "Better a slave than dead".

Paul Faure openly applauded Munich, carrying with him at the time the great majority of the Party. But the aftermath of Munich opened many eyes; the struggle between "Munichois" and "Anti-Munichois" took a serious turn, overshadowing any other issue. At successive Party Conferences Léon Blum won a majority, though the balance remained precarious and shifting. Paul Faure still commanded a majority within the Parliamentary group, and he controlled the party machinery, of which he made unscrupulous use. Léon Blum had some personal friends and a good many political followers¹ but he had never been a master of disciples nor a leader of a faction. And he was always too fair to employ the same means as his antagonists.

¹ Among his lieutenants were Georges Monnet, Minister for Blockade in the Reynaud Government, young and gifted but a little weak; the staunch Marx Dormoy, the veteran Jean Lebas, the friendly Vincent Auriol (they had all been members of Léon Blum's Government), as well as the fiery, bull-headed Jean Zyromski, the leader of the Party's left wing.

The Blumists were treated by their opponents as war-mongers enticing the French workers to be slain for ends and interests which were not their own. (There were insidious hints at Blum's Jewish origin.) War, the Paul Faurists said, could solve no problem: the war of 1914 had shown this. After all, was not this Hitler business mainly a result of Versailles? Nor could anything good ever come out of war; it could only lead to a loss of liberty and social rights. In France, too, it would merely bring about a military dictatorship—as, in fact, it did at the beginning.

There was, it must be admitted, a grain of truth in all these arguments. Yet their pacifist conclusion was entirely fallacious. The Paul Faure group failed to grasp the fact that the social rights of the French workers, including the hard-won forty-hours-week, were endangered not only by the menace of war, but because of the existence of Fascism. War is merely a result; Fascism is at the root. And the workers must fight Fascism everywhere—just because they want to avert any attempt at dictatorship at home.

The feud raged with intense and spiteful bitterness. It soon became a virtual split.

It raged particularly round the party's paper *Populaire*, of which Léon Blum was the political director and chief leader-writer. The paper had to publish official resolutions of the Paris Divisional organisation (a Paul Faure stronghold) blaming it in the most acrimonious terms for its "war-like" attitude. Paul Faure, who had been a daily contributor, refused further collaboration, and founded a weekly paper of his own, *Le Pays Socialiste*, openly opposing, over the signature of the Party's General Secretary, the Party's official policy. There was much talk about where the funds came from, and it is hardly doubtful that they came from some friends of M. Bonnet, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs. The relations of the Paul Faure-Socialist with the "Munichois" of the highest capitalist circles were in fact close: the dividing line cut across parties. Some time before the war, many months before history made the plan a reality, I learned that defeatist "salons" were busy talking about a ministerial combination ready at a moment's notice to take over as soon as Daladier could be got out of the way. The scheme included Marshal Pétain as figurehead, Pierre Laval, the lackey of Mussolini, Bonnet and—Paul Faure. It

was to be a government of "peace"—peace bought at the dictators' price.

Soon after the outbreak of the war a significant incident occurred. A French Socialist, Ludovic Zoretti, a teacher and secretary of the teachers' international professional organisation, had once already brought down on himself the disciplinary action of his Party when, at the time of Munich, he published an article which accused Léon Blum of wanting to drag France into war "to save the German Jews"; he was later pardoned at Blum's request. This man Zoretti now wrote a letter to a Swiss Socialist and Trade Union leader expressing satisfaction that they had been able, immediately after the outbreak of the war, to prevent Léon Blum from entering the Government and pressing for more slaughter. The Swiss Socialist, disgusted, sent the letter to a French friend, who transmitted it to Léon Blum; he placed it before the Party. In his defence Zoretti offered evidence to prove that he had written the letter following a personal interview with Paul Faure. In the course of this conversation Paul Faure stated that he was glad to have prevented the entry into the Government of Herriot and of Léon Blum,

“who would have brought in all Israel”. He had also revealed his readiness to ally himself with any Government that would make peace. He mentioned the name of Laval and, when Zoretti started, added cynically: “To make peace I shall look for men even in the public dustbin.”

Later, Paul Faure was privy to the last-minute intrigues of Bonnet and Daladier when they were about to fall, following the failure to help Finland. But this time he failed to carry more than a tiny minority of his party: the Reynaud Government was formed with Socialist support and collaboration. Paul Faure contributed to its virtual defeat when it first met the Chamber; it was temporarily saved by the Germans launching their attack in the West.

Thus in the ranks of the Socialist Party war and the gravest national issues had become mere occasions for fighting internal battles. The antagonists did not realise that they were moving in a vicious circle. The Blumists, for fear of playing into the pacifists' hands, did not dare to oppose the war as it was being fought by the Daladier clique—and yet they ought to have stood up against this conception of the war, if Hitler was to be defeated. The Faurists in

denouncing war refused even to recognise its Fascist origin—and, by so doing, they actually helped Fascism to make war and to win it. Both, moreover, through their quarrels, weakened the working class to the extent that it was unable to assert its rights or exert its influence. In fact, both fractions were so weak that each became a mere appendage of one section of the ruling classes.

The French workers, through the fault of the Communists and the weakness of the Socialists alike, had no say in this war. By not taking an active part in its direction they were in a way responsible for the defeat. When the end came, the Blumists who had not willed it once more drew the conclusion of the weak and resigned. The Paul Faure group joyfully acquiesced in capitulation. Nobody thought of fighting on.

But if the workers had had no share in the war, theirs was the lion's share in the sacrifice that followed defeat.

MEMORIES OF THE FRONT POPULAIRE

In all these happenings there was an undercurrent of recent memories which cannot be overlooked; it strongly influenced the relations between the classes.

Weak as the French Labour Movement

proved itself, it had been strong enough to incite the employers to stubborn resistance both in the political and the social sphere. The narrow-minded and reactionary conservatism which is the stigma of every ruling class in decline sprang from three roots. One was the economic backwardness of French industry, which had not yet reached the stage where huge combines, through their directors and lawyers, deal with big unions of the men. In the Département du Nord, industrially the most important district of France, relations between capital and labour had only partially changed since the times when Emile Zola described them in "Germinal". Another reason was that French Labour, in spite of changing conditions, had preserved a stock of traditional revolutionary phraseology which was used alike by the Communists, the Syndicalists (Trade Unionists of the old school) and also by some of the Socialists. In actual fact Labour's organisation was just as backward as anything else in French public life; the language of its manifestoes, the methods of its propaganda and also the social legislation which it had secured were about forty years behind their time. The third reason was that Labour, though feeble in many spheres, still

commanded a considerable voting strength and was always a force to be reckoned with in parliamentary politics. In 1919, but for Proportional Representation it would have been formidable. After that the voting system was changed back to the single-member constituency and the second ballot; and the Communist split diminished the Labour vote. In fact the Communist election tactics did most to hurt the Socialists and to spread bitterness amongst the workers. The Communists called it "class versus class", and, ranging the Socialists amongst the "bourgeois" parties, refused to vote for a Socialist in the second ballot, thus presenting the reactionary parties with many dozens of undeserved seats. This method also forced the Socialists to enter into alliances with the bourgeois Radicals: this was the Cartel des Gauches (Left Block), which might win elections, but failed, in the teeth of strong capitalist opposition, to assure stable governments. In the course of ten years of shifting political history France used up more than a dozen governments.

Therefore it meant a big change when in 1934, after an attempted Fascist coup in Paris, Communists, Socialists and Radicals were drawn together in the face of common

danger. A general strike checked the Fascist onslaught. On July 14th, 1934, in the course of a huge mass-demonstration in Paris, the Front Populaire (People's Front) was solemnly constituted and an oath taken before masses, mad with joy, to defend Republican liberties. At the 1936 elections, for the first time, the three parties, though presenting separate candidates, agreed to vote for one another in the second ballot.

Their victory turned out to be even more sweeping than had been expected. It set the whole of the working class in movement.

This is not the place to write the history of these days. A giant drew breath, moved his limbs and felt his own strength. The workers of France lived through a rebirth: they crowded into their unions, overflowed the meeting-halls and invented the sit-down strike. In occupied factories men and women danced to pass the time—as they used to dance on every 14th of July, France's national holiday, in remembrance of a great feat of liberation. On that day the Bastille had been torn down. This time, premises were only temporarily occupied and used for dancing. A more placid revolution had never been witnessed.

When Léon Blum at the head of the first

Government of the Front Populaire took office, he devoted all his energy to getting the movement legalised. At Blum's invitation frightened employers met the representatives of the men, the Premier himself occupying the chair. An agreement fixing Labour's new rights was signed; Parliament worked double shifts; Act after Act went on the Statute book. Membership of the Unions went up by leaps and bounds and at the same time their legal status was raised. Paid holidays and the forty-hours-week followed. These were tremendous changes in an economic system as old and conservative as the French; they rocked and shattered vested interests and inveterate habits. Whoever, at this time, happened to see a French town adapting itself uneasily to the five days-week could not fail to be impressed: the alteration cut deeply into every-day life. At the same time the French workers began to flock into seaside resorts and joyfully crowded sunny beaches from which the former bourgeois occupants grudgingly receded: they did not want to mix up with the "*congés payés*". For the first time in their lives "*métallos*" and little shop-girls saw the beauties of their own country. It mattered little to them that, obviously, some

of the new measures, hastily devised, proved burdensome when put into practice, and that some of the best intentions were spoiled by an ill-adapted and unwilling administration. The employers, of course, did everything to hasten the failure, but also smaller tradesmen, vexed by "*les bureaux*" (some of which practised conscious sabotage), were undoubtedly hit.

Yet, when all is said, these measures, however startling they appeared, amounted to no more than a belated attempt to make up for the shortcomings which had left France far behind in social legislation compared with any of the great industrial nations. To these measures French capitalists reacted with frenzy; a few social reforms brought the country to the verge of counter-revolution.

It must be repeated, however, that these measures were applied to a country whose industrial development lagged far behind; and it is also true that they fell into a period tragically unfavourable to social progress. Next door to France was Germany, which had already begun her frantic goose-step towards high-speed slavery and mechanised death: Hitler, the "mechanised Attila", as Léon Blum has called him, stood in the

ascendant. The French workers got the forty-hours-week at a time when their German comrades had their working-day extended to ten hours and more. This disparity of social progress added to the political disharmony between the advanced nations is a subject for future historians to speculate upon; the contemporary observer merely notes that the spasmodic advance in France was characteristic of the forces in evidence and also of the man who had taken the helm. It was Léon Blum who, accepting the illusion of peaceful co-existence between Fascism and Democracy, tried to erect in the face of Fascism a convincing model of freedom and progress, a home for the decent life of free men. He wanted to show by moral means the superiority of a system of liberty. He failed.

His effort encountered the bitter hostility of the ruling class at home. More than once in the course of twenty years of post-war history the French capitalists had used every means to keep the Socialists from power or to oust governments who relied on their support; and they had always succeeded. After the victory of the Cartel des Gauches in 1924 they had sent the franc tumbling to the bottom, and thus had brought Poincaré

back in triumph as the saviour. They now embarked upon the same methods.

The labour unrest had hardly died down. The position of the Blum Government was still too strong to be assailed in home politics. The first attack was therefore delivered in the field of foreign policy. This was Spain.

When the history of the Spanish war comes to be written, it will record the decisive influence, in its incipient stage, of the French Government's attitude. When the Spanish Republic was assaulted by the military and Fascist rebellion, Léon Blum, giving way to his own feelings, let the Spanish Government expect every help short of military support. On the eve of the Cabinet meeting which was to decide, his lieutenant Vincent Auriol promised a well-known foreign Socialist to see the matter through. But against them the forces of reaction rose like one man: the President of the Republic threw his veto into the balance, the most influential of Radical members of the Government threatened to resign, the generals were in revolt. Léon Blum, with tears in his eyes, hesitated, then gave in. He later admitted in private that had the help for Spain led to a general conflagration he could not have been sure that the mobilisation order would have been

carried out without resistance. Once the policy of non-intervention had been inaugurated it went on, step by step, down the slope, adding derision to dishonour, until on the third frontier of France a potential ally had been transformed into a Fascist vassal of Germany and Italy. Incidentally it was in connection with the Spanish affair that old Marshal Pétain was dug out of his retreat to re-enter French politics.

The second and equally dangerous onslaught was made on the battlefield of finance. Big business once more reverted to the well-known methods which make up the strike of capital: the flight of capital set in, taxes were left unpaid, and it was the employers who practised ca'canny to upset industrial production. These were the visible means, and there were many more hidden away in the privacy of directors' rooms and clouded in the mysteries of the Stock Exchange. The franc again slumped heavily. The Government, in return, fired a few blank shots, like the reorganisation of the Board of the Banque de France and the purely nominal nationalisation of the armament industry. But soon it began to fumble uneasily and to waver. In fact it had to choose between effective means to coerce the capitalists and a policy of

“appeasement”. It tried the latter—and failed again. Vincent Auriol, the Minister of Finance, was thrown overboard, but it was of no avail. The Government was finally brought down by the report of a Senate Committee on the financial situation to which M. Joseph Caillaux, once a liberal and now a leader of obstructive capitalism, uncontested master of the Senate’s obstinacy, lent all his senile spite.

The third attack developed simultaneously on Fascist lines. The Fascist movement in France after its abortive coup in 1934, had lost ground heavily; internal dissensions, the usual jealousy and incapacity of leaders had hit it hard. The semi-military formations had been declared illegal and had re-formed under the disguise of political parties protesting their loyalty to the State. But now a new organisation was set afoot. Built upon foreign models, abundantly supplied with German and Italian money and arms, the plot of the *Cagoullards* (Hooded Men) developed in the dark. A bomb exploded at the headquarters of the French Federation of Industries, rue de Presbourg, in Paris, killing two night-watchmen: a typical act of provocation, since the Press of the Right hastened to lay the crime at the

door of the " Reds ". Murder was rife, too: Carlo Rosselli, an Italian refugee, leader of the organisation " Giustizia e Libertà " (Justice and Liberty), and one of Mussolini's most prominent enemies, was stabbed to death, along with his brother. " Traitors " were killed in romantic fashion, including the use of poisoned needles, strongly reminiscent of the early days of Nazidom in Germany. *Agents provocateurs* made their appearance in factories and working-class quarters. They succeeded in stirring up unrest, unofficial strikes and occasional troubles and clashes: the bloody night of Clichy, one of the industrial suburbs of Paris, resulted in several persons being killed or wounded.

The first clue to these sinister doings was picked up when a lorry crossing from Switzerland into France broke down and one of the boxes which formed the load was smashed in the accident: it was full of arms. The traces led to the discovery of a great number of stores of arms and ammunition dumps hidden away in private houses; of concrete cellars, veritable subterranean fortresses, complete with telephone installation and prison-cells; of plans of sewers and lists of persons marked down for immediate arrest.

The then Minister of the Interior was the

Socialist, Marx Dormoy. He put his foot down, and his energetic action succeeded in bringing to light at least part of the plot. But after a moment of surprise the ranks of reaction re-formed: the plotters could count on powerful help in powerful quarters. High officials closed their eyes before the most striking evidence, magistrates set the offenders free under the flimsiest of pretexts, the courts let them slip through convenient gaps in legal procedure. It was a struggle in the dark, one corner of the net being lifted at great pains only to be covered up again, the next day, by occult forces. The whole Press of the Right was let loose to destroy the clues; Paris was seething with rumours. One name suddenly leapt to many lips, yet nobody dared to pronounce it aloud: General Weygand. At the doorstep of the military big-wigs the power of the Government stopped dead: there was no going farther. A few days after Weygand's name had been whispered, the Blum Government was no more. The affair was hushed up, the arrested *Cagouards* remained in custody for a time, and were then set free without more ado.

The Front Populaire had been brought down by vested interests and dark forces. But lasting hatred remained. In bourgeois

circles the memory became a nightmare and the name a shibboleth: "he has been Front Populaire" was the most devastating stricture that could be pronounced against any man. Nor was this feeling limited to the upper classes. Two years later I was amazed when I heard a typical man of the lower middle-class, a barber who ran his little shop without an attendant, pour out his hatred of the Front Populaire: how they had ruined trade, petted and pampered the workers who would do no work, crushed the middle-class under excessive taxes and wanton social experiments. The poor fellow worked himself up into such a fury, gesticulating with his scissors, that I began to fear for my skin. But the echoes of this fury we shall hear later rumbling through the drama of France.

Daladier came to power, and, breaking openly with the Communists, undertook to put the workers into their place again. He did it step by step, and by so doing became the hero of the bourgeoisie. He was the typical middle-class politician from the provinces who loved drink and costly (if vulgar) women, and cloaked his mediocrity under the appearance of a strong, silent man;¹ moreover, he was obsessed with a

¹ A friend of mine who had been on the staff of a

personal hatred of Léon Blum, born of a sense of inferiority. (In this he strongly resembled the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in his fateful relations to the Socialist leader, Otto Bauer.) In his outward appearance he cultivated a faint likeness to Napoleon, and finally persuaded himself that he who was by nature a shirker had been born to be a dictator. In truth, this much-overrated twopence-ha'penny Napoleon was a pathetic failure; and the régime which he incorporated, a half-baked dictatorship, outwardly strong but inwardly shifting and wavering, was made up of weary routine, lack of ideas and a petty rancour against the workers.

In November 1938, the Trade Unions, after having been deprived of a good many of their gains by successive decrees, decided on a one-day general strike as a protest. Daladier was able to crush it not only by placing the public services under military rule, but also by denouncing it as a political manoeuvre engineered by the Communists to destroy the "peace-policy" of Munich.

Paris daily to which Daladier contributed the political articles remembered that when he sat down to write a "leader" he rarely knew himself what line he would take. His indecision on the night of the attempted Fascist coup, February 6th, 1934, when he was Premier, nearly proved fatal to France.

This defeat set the final seal on the short period of working-class ascendancy. After that Labour was left to lick its wounds and continue to weaken itself by internal strife.

The Front Populaire was dead. Republican Spain had gone under. Ribbentrop had been to Paris to implement "the spirit of Munich". The French alliance with Russia had become a dead letter, short of being formally dropped. A fresh blow was struck when, after the weary negotiations during the summer of 1939, Russia broke away and went over to Germany. At once a hue and cry went up in France: oust the Communists! outlaw the Reds! Even Socialists of the Paul Faure group joined in the chorus; now that the Communists had stolen their clothes by denouncing the war, they became more violently anti-Communist than ever. The Communists were beaten into silence; but the big stick was meant for Labour.

Thus France entered the war with her working class utterly disunited, confused and incapable of action. Even when, later, the Socialists joined the Reynaud Government, their internal dissensions paralysed the party and prevented their ministers from exercising any appreciable influence.

The policy of the French ruling classes even during the war remained strongly tainted with the rankling memories of the Front Populaire: their lust for revenge interfered with their zeal to fight. They had not forgotten how their factories—their property, mind you—had been occupied by the “mob”. Their fear at the time of what the workers would do had run far ahead of what the workers themselves had actually done or even wanted to do. A mighty man never forgives when someone has seen him tremble. A ruling class never forgets when once it has been afraid.

THE FIFTH COLUMN

There was another aspect to the tragedy. The forces which made for disruption within the working class had far less effect in determining the fate of France than those elements which worked like a ferment within the decaying upper classes. Dominant amongst them was the widespread activity of the Fifth Column.

In starting upon this subject I want to warn readers not to expect sensational disclosures. I was a foreigner with no access to French fashionable salons and bourgeois society; I was barred, through my past, from

even the remotest contact with the network of dictatorial diplomacy, German or other; I knew only what an outside observer could see and hear and read between the lines.

There are others in a better position than myself to reveal what passed behind the scenes. There ought to be Frenchmen who will speak up now. Let them do so, by all means. Let them do so even at the risk of incurring the blame that they have spoken too late. On the other hand, let nobody believe that any Frenchman could yet reveal the whole truth about the Nazi methods which ruined France. The day will come when that system of evil will be smitten; when secrets will be thrown open, hands unfettered and tongues untied. Then the world will hear a story of spies and plotters and gangsters and poisoners which will make the Elders of Zion, that much-boasted Nazi myth, look a pale shadow. And the world will gasp with horror.

The story of the psychological war which Nazi Germany conducted in France years before the actual war started must be traced back at least to the days of Munich. The Germans were able to utilise for their ends strong sentiments deeply rooted in the French

people: the love of peace and the love of life and comfort shared by the rich and the humble alike.

Everybody knows the story of how Daladier, flying back from Munich, saw a huge mass waiting for him at the airport and feared they would tear him to pieces. When he finally risked the landing he saw them waving frantically and heard them cheering. Then he is said to have used a very contemptuous expression . . . and he drove through them in his car with the gesture of a victorious dictator. He had brought them peace.

The night before, I had a personal experience which impressed me deeply. When the results of the Munich conference became known I had been lucky in getting hold of a newspaper; in crowded streets the copies were torn from the sellers' hands. A man rushed up to me, and I showed him the news. He heaved a sigh of relief. I offered some cautious comment, but he answered from the depth of his honest heart:

"Je me fiche pas mal de la Tchécoslovaquie. . . . J'ai deux fils à l'armée!" (I don't care a damn for Czechoslovakia. I have two sons with the army.)

"Well, next time Hitler will ask for Alsace-Lorraine," I said.

"For all I care he may have it," was the reply.

And thus Czechoslovakia was betrayed. My friend G. E. R. Gedye, in his book "Fallen Bastions", has told the story of this defeat for democracy. How often have I since been reminded of his moving account! We were in the main Continental bastion now, which, through treacherous and criminal folly, had let its strongest outpost fall into the enemy's hands. It paid for it. France lost the war partly because it had lost Czechoslovakia: it was the absence of an eastern front which made the onslaught in the west so formidable. And France lost the war mainly because of the same reasons which had made her abandon her ally. It seemed like the working of destiny in a Greek tragedy: a fate was fulfilled to avenge a crime. One could almost feel the dead ramparts of the Czech bastion reaching out of their graves of concrete and gripping the Maginot Line, as their great Skoda guns now stood on the Siegfried Line threatening the French. The fall of the bastion entailed the fall of the fortress.

At Munich France had abdicated as a Continental Power. This was the immediate effect of the "spirit of Munich", which Ger-

man propaganda distilled and manipulated with great skill. The German game had been made easy by the mood of the French people, but it was a thoroughly adroit game, all the same. They were, moreover, fortunate in having as one of the pawns in their game the Foreign Minister of France himself. M. Georges Bonnet had always been what the French parliamentary jargon called an "*utilité*": that is to say, a politician without personality. He was unimpressive enough to be either Minister of Commerce or of Justice or Ambassador, and in fact had been each of these in turn; he fitted into nearly every combination. His one ambition was to become one day Premier; but the attempts he made to realise this dream—which was said to be even more the dream of his extremely ambitious wife—failed dismally. However, Bonnet was a very rich man. Through his wife he was connected with one of the biggest banks in France, in which he held a big interest. He was therefore a trustee of big business, and any ministerial combination which included him was considered "safe" from the capitalist point of view. At the same time, this long-nosed, well-groomed nonentity had the easy manner of the French leisured class; he

could quite well make friends with a man of the Left, too, if that suited his plans.

His wife's salon was one of the high-lights of Paris society life. This hostess could boast of the most wide-flung variety of important people amongst her guests: and there they met Abetz, the German arch-spy (now, as German Minister to the Vichy Government, the true Statthalter of France). "A Minister's wife" figured prominently in the whispers at the time when Abetz was expelled from France, and it was known that she had repeatedly boasted "to have great influence with her husband".

There were, it is true, other influential groups which partly concurred, partly competed with the first. A pro-Italian clique opposed the pro-German clan. Its head was Pierre Laval, of whom we shall hear more in later chapters. It was no less active, and disposed of equally great means, which assured it considerable support in the Press. These people gave themselves, moreover, an air of being less treacherous than the pro-Germans. In fact, they posed as wardens of national interests championing a policy which would ward off Hitler by steering France into an alliance with Italy. Laval, a master of lobbying, kept

on repeating that if only he were given the chance he would bring round Mussolini in a whiff. It was the old fallacious theory that if only you would be accommodating enough, you could buy off one dictator, play him off against another, or even make him an ally of democracy: how often has it been tried in these agonising years—and how desperately has it always failed!

In the pro-German clan there was also Pierre-Etienne Flandin, who, like Bonnet, had filled many ministerial posts, including that of Premier. He had been pro-British at a time when this meant being strongly conservative and pro-appeasement, but his more important loyalty lay with the Comité des Forges, the employers' organisation in the iron and steel trade, which included, under the leadership of M. de Wendel, the magnates of coal and steel from Lorraine, and was by far the most powerful industrial organisation in France. Flandin was the man who, at the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis, had plastered the walls of France with a poster which even the Government of the day held to be seditious and who, after Munich, had sent a telegram of congratulation to Hitler.

Farther down in the list of expenses of the

German secret service there was a host of agents of varying degrees of importance, honesty and delicacy in handling—right down to the pay-roll of the ordinary spy and bravo. There was the Comité Franco-Allemand (Franco-German Committee), presided over by M. Fernand de Brinon, Abetz' most intimate friend, whom Bonnet sent on a special mission to Berlin, much to the annoyance of the then French Ambassador, M. Coulondre. (Brinon is at present Vichy's Ambassador with the Germans in Paris.) He in turn was the protector of Ferdonnet, who wrote anti-Semitic books and later became the "traitor of Stuttgart", the principal French speaker on the German radio. The mercenaries further included Doriot, a former secretary of the Communist Party who had turned Fascist and was paid to lead a "party" of very few members, but which occasionally made a little noise.

You could thus see the network spread: there were the men of business who kept up appearances, but who were interested in the German system of keeping the workers down. There were the intellectuals, critics of parliamentary democracy, admirers of "authority", renovators, schemers; the

writers whose books would never have been published but for a little help and the pulling of "ropes"; men of doubtful talents but of indubitable ambitions, neglected geniuses, malcontents, intellectual misfits, *déclassés*. There were also women, beautiful women, clever women, ambitious women; women who wielded influence and women who needed money. There were finally the Fascists proper.

There were even several brands of them. The most important organisation was the former *Croix de feu* movement (an ex-servicemen's organisation), which, after the ban on para-military formations, had been transformed into the Parti Social Français (P.S.F.). Its leader was Count Casimir de la Rocque, a retired colonel and a coward, but whose Brass-hat oratory nevertheless went down with that "*bon bougre*" (good fellow), the French ex-serviceman in a "*béret*" (peakless cap) and with many medals and ribbons. He had known more than one awkward corner in his career; now he had been supplied with sufficient money to buy an important Paris daily, *Le Petit Journal*, of which he became the director. There had been a lot of jealousy around him, as usual, and some of his underlings had

broken away, forming various dissident groups and accusing him of dishonesty and corruption. His most serious opponent, however, was Doriot, with his Parti Populaire Français (P.P.F.), a good popular orator and a shrewd fellow who, in his Communist days, had looked deep into the secrets of Moscow's tactics and had learned a lot about organisation and propaganda. Most influential of all was the anti-Republican *Action Française*, led by Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras and disposing of a widely-read daily; its Royalist label nowadays merely covers a most reactionary policy and organisation, in some ways more Fascist than the Fascists themselves.

We have already seen the agencies through which the system worked. One was the influence of reactionary political salons, snobbish society hostesses and their crowds. Another instrument of growing importance was the anti-Semitic propaganda. Filthy sheets after the pattern of the Nazi *Stuermar* appeared in the streets of Paris, and anti-Jewish slogans were scribbled in filthy places. The most important means of influencing public opinion, however, was a vile and venal Press.

In most countries the majority of the Press

defends the interests of those who own papers just as they own steel-mills. *Le Temps*, the most influential of French journals, the mouthpiece of the French Foreign Office, the paper of which Jules Guesde once said that it was "*la bourgeoisie faite journal*" (the bourgeoisie embodied in a paper), was owned by the Comité des Forges. All this is inherent in the existing order; yet within this "natural" order of things the French Press had a world-wide and well-earned reputation for bribery and corruption.

Even before the last war it had been known to be accessible to Tsarist gold. In post-war years every reactionary power in Europe—and even some others, if they disposed of enough money—had been able to buy support in the Paris Press. An expert could have told you exactly how much a certain campaign had cost and through which channels it had been arranged. The intervention of the "spirit of Munich"—i.e., the German propaganda—naturally increased the opportunities and varied the forms. It was not always a case of cash down; it was shares and discreet partnerships and friendships and family-bonds. Overnight a paper would drop its opposition and go "Munichois" or "pacifist" (which

was another, less conspicuous form of saying the same thing). This was the case of the Radical paper *L'Oeuvre*, which had a big circulation amongst intellectual and working-class readers. Sometimes the shading was so careful that the readers would hardly be aware that they had been sold along with a bundle of shares. Right into the war this thing continued, and it became epidemic in the days of defeat. One of many examples is afforded by *Paris-Soir*, one of the biggest papers in the world, which in France, during war-time, had practically achieved a monopoly as an evening paper. It had published sensational interviews with Hitler before the war and equally sensational ones with Hitler's opponents afterwards; and it turned cautiously pro-Hitler again after the surrender. Its director, M. Jean Prouvost, was made head of the Information Department under Reynaud—and remained at his post under Laval, dispensing exactly the opposite kind of information. He also owned the biggest illustrated weekly *Match*. In the days of confusion after the armistice it often happened that you came across a newsagent's who still displayed last week's papers. There hung the pictures of Churchill and Reynaud, and even some old photo of General Gamelin,

and the weeklies were full of praise for "our valiant British allies"—how quickly the tide had turned! There they hung, dried-up saliva of the sycophants, a loathsome, sickening sight.

There were notable exceptions to the low moral standard of the French Press, and it is only just to mention them. There was Pertinax (André Giraud), a highly respected expert in international politics and military matters, and one of the best brains of French conservatism. There was Geneviève Tabouis, a little overrated by Goebbels as well as by her many friends, 'forceful in temperament rather than strong in exact knowledge or judgment, accumulating at high speed all the ill-assorted information which diplomatic gossip could furnish. There was Henri de Kérillis, a deputy and former leader of a semi-fascist group, but who had the courage to rectify past errors; in his paper *L'Epoque* he conducted a forceful campaign against the Fifth Column, disclosing its ramifications; this won him many admirers and made him many terrible enemies. There was Emile Buré, the fat, voluble little man with the actor's mane and a style crammed with personal anecdotes. He had been a Socialist in his young days

(as he had one time been Briand's secretary and friend) and, curiously enough, had preserved some notion of the "Marxist" conception of history, which made this avowed conservative nationalist look at things in a different and sometimes perspicacious way. In his journal *L'Ordre* he kept repeating that it was the "fear of Stalin" which had blinded the Western capitalists to the danger of Hitler and Mussolini; in deadly fear for their safes, they had looked to the dictators for protection; this policy of narrow class-interest was leading them right into national disaster. These four thoroughly French journalists had the distinction to figure on the first list of those whom the Vichy Government deprived of their French nationality—an honour they deserved.

Another journal deserves special mention in the opposite sense: that is the case of *Gringoire*. This weekly, with a very big circulation, has been all along the herald of reaction in its most abject form. It usually carried abominable personal attacks against public men of the Left, and sometimes it would succeed in hunting down its quarry: as when Roger Salengro, Socialist Minister of the Interior in the first Blum Government, committed suicide after hav-

ing been exposed for weeks to a libellous campaign denouncing him as a deserter in the last war. At the victim's bier Léon Blum branded *Gringoire* with the stigma "*la feuille infâme*" (the infamous paper), and never pronounced its name again. Now the infamous paper has had its revenge by demanding that "*l'infâme Blum*" should be arrested—and obtaining it. In fact, in the days of Vichy, *Gringoire*, still more widely read, assumed a political rôle of the first importance. It was the public informer, the denouncer, digging up old slanders and inventing new ones and unbridling its lust for revenge. Whoever was now attacked in this paper could reckon himself a doomed man; while the man behind it, Jean Chiappe, former President of Police in Paris and protector of the Fascists, was made the first President of the Paris City Council under German rule.

But let us get back to the days when this witch-cauldron of the French Press was more or less secretly stirred by the long arms of Goebbels. Sometimes an evil-smelling bubble would come up to the surface and burst. Such a scandal, always quickly hushed up by official discretion and complicity, was the expulsion of Abetz. Another

was caused by the discovery that a stenographer in the Senate had delivered the minutes of the secret debates of the Senate's Committee on military affairs into German hands. In this affair a manager of *Le Temps* and other important persons were implicated.

And this is precisely what the working of the Fifth Column brings to light when you examine for a moment its deeper aspects. Before the era of Hitler, spying had been a miserable business, a profession of the underworld. It might appear romantic on the movies-screen; in actual life it was a wretched job for hirelings, despicable and despised. The intrusion of gangsterism into history on a colossal scale has changed this. Nazidom started by leading the sons of correct German teachers and law-abiding officials far away from the path of legality, to bomb-outrages, kidnapping and murder. It lent the glory of heroic deeds to illegal and criminal actions, thus destroying the moral standards of bourgeois society. Like corrosive acid, it has dissolved former values and changed the moral outlook of a generation. It has made spying a national duty and treason a fashionable occupation. In the old times a spy and a traitor had known

that there was no other end to his life than, sooner or later, a pistol in his hand or a rope round his neck; now a Quisling or a Seyss-Inquart were able to hope for a governorship—at least for a time. Thus the Fifth Column is one of the most significant symptoms of a system infected by Fascism. The very pillars of society crumble as putrid and deadly decomposition spreads.

CHAPTER TWO: WAR

“DRÔLE DE GUERRE”

At the outbreak of war I ventured to put into an article the sentence: “This war cannot be waged and it cannot be won by conservative methods”. The French censor struck it out. Again, when the German offensive on the Western front started, I tried to smuggle into an article of mine a quotation from an English weekly saying that if democracy was to defend itself it must be prepared for revolutionary changes. The censor’s comment was: “This stuff you can print in England, but not here.” These two sentences which annoyed the censor nearly sum up the whole problem of France’s attitude in the war.

When the war started, it became at once apparent that the French intended to conduct the war of 1940 with the methods of 1914. Put into a nutshell, this was the tragedy.

Some weeks before, I had put certain suggestions for dealing with a particular problem to a French friend.

"Splendid idea," he said, "but I'm afraid I went with it to the Minister I should get no hearing."

"And why not?"

"Well, you see, people here don't believe in systematic preparation. We French are so good at organising; we just muddle through. But we have a genius for improvisation."

This excuse was frequently given and commonly accepted, but it was only a half-truth. The French genius for improvisation had its wings clipped by routine.

I shall not enter upon a discussion of the strategical situation on the outbreak of war. The mobilisation worked without a hitch. But while Poland was being overrun, the cautious mock-advance of the French into a small corner of German territory along the frontier proved the first disappointment. It is not my business to repeat here the heart-rending story of how the defenders of Warsaw, up to the last minute, clung to the hope of Allied help: that the Allies would send 'planes and would attack in the West. The French Press was exuberant in its praise for the Polish heroes. The French generals held on to the Maginot Line.

In French inner life, from the first day of

the war, the Brass-hats took command. The civilian authorities were overruled by the military. You might thus have imagined that the soldier's sword would cut brutally, yet efficiently, through the knots of red tape. You were wrong: red tape was merely doubled. The civilian authority to whom you applied would send you round to some military bureau; after knocking at innumerable doors, you might finally get hold of an officer who did not deny that he was meant to deal with your demand; but after weeks of waiting he was sure to tell you that he had had to send your dossier back to the civilian authority and that, anyhow, the final decision lay with somebody else. The individual official, in most cases, was helpful and human; officialdom, whether in uniform or in mufti, shrank from taking any responsibility.

The first big problem which arose out of the war was that of evacuation. It has proved difficult in other countries as well. In France there had even been some schemes prepared beforehand; but when it came to the test they turned out to be hopelessly inadequate. The inhabitants of the border zone, people from Alsace and Lorraine, which ranked amongst the most highly cul-

tured regions of France, were dumped on farm-houses and little villages where there was no accommodation, no provision for meals, no sanitary installations. This proved particularly awkward, since many of the Alsatians spoke not French, but their German dialect, and part at least were of doubtful loyalty. The situation grew so ticklish that in this case articles were allowed to appear in the Press and official speeches made to soothe ill feeling.

Another example of horrible bungling was the treatment of ex-enemy aliens. I remember having the distinct feeling that even the poster which ordered their "*rassemblement*" dated from 1914. I have no doubt that the Colonel Blimp who directed these operations had reckoned—as in 1914—with a few hundred people all told. But since we were in 1940, in Paris alone many thousands of German and Austrian refugees stood in queues for three or four days waiting to be admitted into a football-ground. There they were kept for three weeks, sleeping on the concrete of the stands or on the open ground without tents, receiving nothing but cold food, except coffee, and having to queue up for hours to get a mouthful of water. Sanitary conditions were so awful

that French army doctors admitted all they could do was to pray to be spared the outbreak of an epidemic. From there the internees were sent to the provinces—often to be unloaded on nothing but a damp ground fenced off with barbed wire or in front of a ramshackle barn which they themselves had to make into a shelter; for months they had neither tables nor benches—in fact, nothing whatever to sit on. But even worse than the physical inconveniences were the hardships which soulless routine inflicted upon them: difficulties in the way of writing or getting letters or parcels or newspapers, and, above all, the uncertainty of their fate. It had been promised that at an early date they would be sorted out; in fact, different categories were created and commissions were set up which contested each other's competence and cancelled one another's decisions. It was a terrible mess. To get a case settled, three different Ministerial departments had to agree, and some military authority had finally to decide and give the order for release. The result was that genuine Nazis who happened to have married a Frenchwoman were set free, while notable German Anti-Hitlerites who had languished for years in German prisons and

concentration camps—in fact, whom Hitler would have had beheaded, had he got hold of them—were kept interned. I could go on for any length of time relating the iniquities of this tragic muddle; we shall come up against it once more at a later stage.

Another sore spot was more universally recognised: this was the orgy of incompetence which raged round the services of information and propaganda. They also included censorship and broadcasting, and there was as much overlapping here as anywhere else. No need to dwell on details of this sad story; it is widely known, and the French Press itself has said as much about it as it was allowed to, and even its enforced silence had a voice: it spoke through the white spots on the papers' pages. Looking deeper, it was highly significant to note who was chosen at the start to direct French propaganda: Jean Giraudoux, a fine brain, but one of the most sophisticated of French authors. No choice could denote more clearly the state of mind in which the French ruling classes faced the war.

Small wonder, therefore, that French propaganda completely failed to appeal to the masses. It did not go down with them,

it carried no appeal to the man in the street. Not a single film worth speaking of was produced. A singular attempt was made with a medley of cuttings from old news-reels "From Lenin to Hitler" (to words written by André Maurois); it was a dismal affair. Most of the broadcast speeches were similarly boring, some were stark, gaping failures.

The reason for all this was certainly not mere lack of talent or of good-will. The reason lay deeper. It was the disinclination of the French bourgeoisie to embark upon an "ideological war" against Fascism. Hitler was to be treated as a nasty fellow disturbing the comfort of a well-ordered world; any criticism of this world was anathema. Nothing was to be said of the tremendous impact of social forces which is shaking our civilisation. The ideals of liberty were to be served up in a conventional form as they had been preserved and diluted through seventy years of a respectable bourgeois republic. The children were not to know that history progresses through frightful shocks and that communities, like men, are born in spasms and blood and sharp, piercing pains.

It cannot be said too strongly nor repeated

too often: France's war effort was doomed to failure because the French masses, however inadequate their own Labour organisations, were not roused to stand up against the arch-enemy of liberty; because they were not inspired with the holy faith to fight for freedom. They had a war on their hands, but their rulers gave them no ideal to die for.

This is also the answer to those who believed that once the war had begun even legitimate aspirations had to be silenced and the under-dog stifled into more than usual obedience. There was to be no question of social justice or of an equitable distribution of the national effort. Class interests were treason, it was preached—but this was preached only to the classes which had a claim and a grievance. Even the mind of many Labour leaders worked this way: Wait until the war is over—now that the guns speak, the workers can have no voice. But has not the fate of France proved that guns alone do not win a war?

And what was more: for ten months or so the guns did not speak at all. Brass-hat bureaucracy was in command. Cautious men of routine stood at the helm. And the war began—cautiously, motionless, nearly in

silence. It soon earned its nick-name: "*Drôle de guerre*" (this funny war—the more correct translation of what the Americans called "phoney war").

Why was it so funny? Because both the warring parties seemed to sit back and to wait for the other to begin. None would attack, and hardly any one would fire a shot. Aircraft made long reconnaissance flights and dropped leaflets, not bombs. From the front line there came stories of how French and Germans teased each other with practical jokes. And the boys wrote home and they came regularly on leave and they said that they were well fed and well treated.

And the people in Paris, after the first air-raid alarms had been got over and the first annoyances about letters not arriving quickly enough and family allowances not being paid in time had been allayed, settled down to it. After a time, the evacuated children came back and many others who had left at the beginning, and closed shops opened again, and the blackout rules were less strictly observed: life went back to quasi-normal. During the first weeks the kindly concierge whose dog used to play with mine would ardently sympathise with

every woman in the neighbourhood who had got news from "out there"; gradually she would lose interest and take it for granted that all remained pretty quiet. People would grumble at the marked rise in prices and the lack of coffee or oil or sugar, but after a while they would somehow get used to that too. Communists did their best to stir up discontent by whispered words and an occasional hand-bill and by circulating type-written sheets which served as the clandestine edition of the banned *l'Humanité*. They were frequently rounded up by the police and severely dealt with by the courts. They usually got five years, even for slight offences; only a few more serious cases of wreckers in aircraft factories became known. Yet somehow the activity of the Communists also did not seem to carry very far: they failed to achieve more than to add a little to the passive dislike of the war.

On the other hand, the Nazi Brown House in Paris had been closed, and its more notorious customers had to go warily. Some German spies and Alsatian pro-Nazis were arrested and two or three executed. The Fifth Column had to work more surreptitiously than ever—but work it did. It worked for "peace" in high quarters.

Thus, while Communist youths, foolishly acting as Hitler's cat's-paws, were sent to prison, the real destructive opposition to the war went unpunished. This opposition was not apparent; it gnawed stealthily in the dark.

And all the time it was a war of nerves, and Hitler knew very well what he was waiting for. And all the time the French bourgeoisie did not want to go any farther than the "funny war", because you could never know what would happen once the fury of events was turned loose.

And all the time, from this uneventful war one thing stood out, a dominant fact, a symbol, a myth: the Maginot Line.

THE MYTH OF THE MAGINOT LINE

Its shadow loomed large in the background of all French life. Civil life and politics and international relations seemed but trivial, shifting affairs moving in the foregrounds. The mighty thing in the background never changed: it remained immovable and impregnable. That was the Maginot Line.

It was the symbol of protective strength. It had taken years to build, and thousands of millions had been dug into the earth. It was a miracle of modern technique, never

equalled in its colossal perfection nor in the multitude of its ingenious and surprising details. It bore the name of a former Minister of War, François Maginot, who had been a sergeant in the last war and was hailed as the driving force behind this vast construction. But since the late Maginot had been a man of the Right, the parties of the Left claimed the honour for one of their representatives, Paul Painlevé, to have been the original initiator. This historical dispute remained unsettled.

But whoever conceived the plan and whoever carried it out was inspired by a motive on which, finally, nearly all Frenchmen were agreed, which had, indeed, sunk as deeply into the nation's soul as the piles of the Maginot Line had been driven into the earth. For one thousand years the Rhine had roughly constituted the frontier between the Franco-Gallic and the Teutonic worlds. For centuries wars had raged along and over its banks, high up in Burgundy and down in the Low Countries; no other river in Europe had seen its waters so often mingled with blood. In the course of the last hundred years alone there had been four periods of war (Napoleon's wars, 1851-1866, 1870, 1914-1918). Within two hundred

years Alsace and part of the Rhineland had three or four times changed hands. The great idea behind the Maginot Line was to erect a solid line of permanent defence along the historic line of permanent battle. The wall of human bodies who eternally mounted guard on the eastern border of France was to be fortified and partly substituted by a powerful stretch of concrete.

This idea became national property. But it assumed yet another meaning when the Nazis had achieved power in Germany. Hitler at the gates—well, our door is strong. Shut it and keep them out! We have nothing to do with them. Let them do in Germany what they like: strangle freedom, torture people, enslave labour, drive the Jews out, kill men and women in concentration camps—this is no concern of ours. We are safe behind the Maginot Line.

The Maginot Line thus became the incarnation of a passive and merely defensive attitude towards Nazism. It is this same principle of national egoism, of seeking safety within one's own house, which wrought havoc in European politics between 1935 and 1940. It struck the nations with paralysis and destroyed collective security. Every one of them retired and shut the door: let the

storm blow outside, let the fire rage next door: that is no concern of ours. Instead of active defence, they chose passive acceptance. Instead of uniting against the common danger, they preferred to wait in isolation until each of them was slain separately.

Fascism knows no neutrality—you are with it or you are against it. Totalitarian dictatorship leaves only a choice between being vassal or victim. Neutrality, non-intervention, independence of small nations, isolation: these are merely so many names for swallowing the Fascist bait. The French learned it too late. They had themselves nurtured the illusion of isolating themselves behind their Maginot Line. But Fascism is an international menace. It is not to be beaten off by mere fences.

This is, indeed, an important clue to all that happened in France. The more the nation was penetrated by the belief that it was fully protected by the Maginot Line, the more its preparations, and later its war effort, became exclusively limited to this. The feeling of security which it afforded made the Maginot Line a national myth. The psychological limitations which it entailed made it an international danger.

This had been shown already in March 1936, when Hitler sent his troops into the Rhineland to re-militarise it. Feeling in France would have been certainly stronger had not the Maginot Line seemed a solid enough safeguard. It also played its part when France let down Czechoslovakia: the loss of the Czech bastion seemed less important if only the Maginot Line stood unimpaired—Hitler would not dare to attack it. However, he had already begun to build the Siegfried Line and feverishly pushed the work ahead; soon the two monsters faced each other, guns grinning at guns, cement opposing cement.

When the war began, France's manhood mounted guard in the Maginot Line. Whoever saw these fortifications manned and ready to blast forth a fury of fire could not fail to be impressed. Journalists grew rhapsodical about them; "like giant battle-ships sunk into the earth" became a standing phrase in all their descriptions.

And then, following the trend of the "funny war", something very funny happened. The world's greatest fighting line became a singularly quiet spot. It was not a healthy life which the troops led in the Maginot Line, deep down in the bowels of

the earth, always in artificial light, in vermin-infected caverns; but it was in the main a quiet life.

This oddity largely contributed to the character of the "funny war". Here was the mightiest military installation the world had ever seen. Here were powerful armoured turrets swinging silently into position when a little knob was pushed. Here were giant guns moved by invisible powers, matchless marvels of mechanics and at the same time monstrous instruments of destruction—and some of them went through ten months of war without firing a single shot. It looked as if the machinery of death had grown so gigantic that at last man hesitated to set it in motion. So deeply had the opponents dug themselves into the earth that they seemed fixed to the spot and unable to move. They had constructed such prodigious engines to hurl hell at one another that they halted as if struck by the monstrosity of the enterprise; at least the French seemed afraid of the shock their audacity would produce. The over-elaborate preparation seemed to defeat its own ends.

Bent on defence from the outset, the French waited for the Germans to attack,

For many months this attack did not come. In the meantime another form of warfare developed—between the lines. Night after night patrols went out to the little block-houses, observation-posts and machine-gun nests in No-Man's-Land. They led a trappers' war, daring and dangerous. Stalking and ambush were their means of fighting, a surprise attack, a few shots fired, a couple of prisoners made—and then back again where the big guns towered in the rear. This was indeed a funny war, fought with the methods of 1850 in between the forts and guns of 1940!

But the most uncommonly funny thing was to come later. It was the greatest tragi-comedy in the military history of all ages: the Maginot Line, that wonder of the world, went down without having been attacked. There was no storming, no breaking through it. It was turned—and abandoned. It was not tested. It proved useless.

What had happened? Historians and military experts will later examine the question whether and why the line of fortifications which had been built in extension of the Maginot Line along the Franco-Belgian frontier was too weak. The fact is that the Germans broke through

exactly at the angle where the Maginot Line ended and that weaker line of fortifications began; and they broke through with comparative ease. For those who cannot probe the charge of criminal neglect nor claim sufficient expert knowledge to judge the Belgian campaign as a whole, another reason is apparent. Against the miracle of defensive technique which the Maginot Line represented, the Germans set an equally monstrous, equally marvellous accumulation of offensive engines moved by a will to push ahead. And the 'planes and the tanks and all these mobile machines—moving at the speed of motor vehicles—got the better of the cemented resistance. Progressive force beat conservative defence.

How it was done now belongs to history. Near Sedan and Montmédy the German tanks got through. Near Rheims they smashed their way through the second line of French defence. Once they entered Dijon, the Maginot Line had to be abandoned. The troops leaving the fortifications tried to form a fighting square and to offer resistance. They were soon surrounded, and later surrendered.

No one can imagine the shock which the fall of the Maginot Line brought to all

Frenchmen unless he understands the place it held in the sub-conscious life of the nation. This was not merely a deadly blow struck at the nation's body and life; it was a collapse into bottomless horror that made France faint with panic and humiliation. It was the breakdown of an idol. It was the painful, lamentable loss of a god.

It is merely an appropriate epilogue to this downfall of a myth that the fall of the Maginot Line should have been followed by one of the queerest episodes of this war. When the great soulless monster broke up, there were little islands left in the wilderness which, at the height of confusion, had received no order to evacuate. They were cut off, their communications interrupted, their wireless installations out of order—or they simply did not believe the incredible news. The fact is that the garrisons of isolated forts and little sectors continued to fight—nay, they began to fight when the war was over. Once upon a time they had been ordered to fight on, even if the neighbouring posts had been silenced or taken. And fight on they did. The Germans were unable to storm them, and attempts to inform them of their tragic error proved unavailing. They would not believe the

truth. Thus they held out for days, and the Armistice Commission had to get together and deal with the situation, and with great difficulties French officers finally succeeded in convincing this unflinching handful of heroes that the Maginot Line was lost, that France was defeated and that they were fighting for a dead cause.

Could a Shakespeare invent a more befitting end to a great tragedy than this: that the only serious fighting in the Maginot Line took place after the armistice? Let Yorrick laugh at the ironical heroism of these poor fellows who finally brought life, a fierce fiery life, to the Maginot Line—some days after it was dead.

WAS IT TREASON?

Why did the French army fail? A serious answer to this question lies far out of the range of this book. Whoever attempts to find it will have to bear in mind some essential facts.

It is common knowledge to-day that France's air force, right up to the war, was vastly inferior to the German, and that her aircraft production was in a deplorable state. Figures have been quoted which made people gasp. There is no use in trying to probe

their exactitude nor to lay the blame at the door of this or that individual Minister. Pétain himself had been in charge of the Ministry of War during a considerable time, and Daladier held this office for years: is the one less responsible than the other?

Two facts stand out. One is the state of mind of the French military leaders, who, as we have seen, concentrated their main attention on the conservative system of defence based on the Maginot Line. France's desire was peace, and her mood was passive. Her ruling class did not want to fight, and her generals discouraged innovations. The other, still more important factor was the state of the French industry.

Germany had screwed up her enormous industrial machinery until its wheels whizzed at terrific speed, turning out 'planes and tanks by the thousands in record time. Against this combination of rationalised efficiency and ruthless slave-driving—the "mechanised Attila" was made possible by the mathematical Pharaoh—French industry looked indeed a poor affair. It had always been behind modern standards; the distance which now separated it from the German industrial frenzy grew more menacing every day. A friend of mine once spoke

to a worker in an aircraft factory at Bordeaux: in the sixth month of the war their output was still no more than five 'planes a month. Industrial backwardness combined with official slackness and the lack of enthusiasm among the working masses: this is what prevented France from catching up in the race.

But then look at the map. France's main army took the field against Germany. She had another army guarding the Alps against the Italians; a non-official estimate gave this army's strength at about 1·3 millions. She had a third one in North Africa, from Tunis to Morocco, probably another million strong. A fourth one, the army first commanded by Weygand, stood in the Near East, in Syria; it was believed to number 600,000. Out of these four armies, all fully equipped, only one—the Metropolitan army—was actually engaged in war, if we discount the few days of fighting against the Italian marauders. At the moment when France laid down her arms three of her armies were practically unimpaired, two of them having never fired a shot. This peculiar situation may have parallels in history; it is unique in that the defeat of one army brought about a downfall as complete and as disastrous as that of France.

This again was the outcome of converging elements. One is the obvious strategical reason: France had to man four fronts, while Germany had one. The Germans' numerical superiority in aircraft and tanks was multiplied by the fact that they were able to assemble all their hammering weapons on one front only, while France had to disperse her much inferior air force and motorised units over three continents. The advantage of the "inner line" which is the result of Germany's geographical position in the centre of Europe (and the counterpart to her vulnerability to the blockade) was thus strikingly demonstrated. It coincided, as we have already noted, with the absence of an Eastern front. Not only had France abandoned Czechoslovakia, but Russia had broken with the Western Powers and as a consequence Poland had been crushed by Germany within a short time. That the Nazis were able with staggering blows to crush France, too, in six weeks' time, they owed to the non-existence of an Eastern opponent. This Hitler owes to Stalin.¹

¹ It is argued in defence of Moscow's policy that the French bourgeoisie had clearly demonstrated its dislike of Russia, which is true, and that Stalin had rightly foreseen both its weakness and its treachery: therefore he was justified in not throwing in his lot

At the same time one cannot fail to observe here again the paralysing effects of the purely defensive ideology of the French. Did they ever seriously consider using any of their remaining armies for offensive action elsewhere? Did they think of dealing a blow to the enemy's bases of supply? We do not know. But what we do know is that when Reynaud, in the hour of danger, conceived the idea of falling back on these non-Metropolitan armies and the vast resources of the French Empire, this plan was foiled. It was too audacious a plan, too damned "revolutionary." The French ruling class chose submission rather than rely on forces—military or other—outside the traditional field.

In France itself, moreover, the barracks were bristling with bayonets, and an observer, at the time of the crisis, might well have been surprised at the huge reserves of man-power which, apparently, were left unused. The "territorials" whom one saw on guard duty everywhere looked quite young and fit.

with France. Against this, however, must be said that the war would have taken an entirely different turn from the outset had Russia been in on the side of the Western Powers; and that even if she wanted to keep out, there was no need to conclude a pact with Hitler.

The various police forces, numerically strong and physically a' choice corps, had not been called upon. Whether these reserves had been trained for modern warfare is another question, but there is no doubt that another army could have been drawn from their numbers. But this would have meant an exceptional effort—and the will to make efforts was lacking.

Speaking of efforts and numerical strength, let us put in a word here about the delicate question of British help. All the time this question held an important place in the minds and feelings of the French people. There was no more effective slogan of the German propaganda than the sneer: "England will fight to the last Frenchman." The Communists later harped on the same tune with a slightly different accent (which, however, Goebbels was quick in adopting): "It is the plutocrats of the City", they said, "who are sending French workers and peasants out to die." Two major facts intervened to give the lie to this propaganda. One was the adoption, shortly before the war, of conscription in Britain; perhaps the bulk of the British people never quite realised how important this was in view of Franco-British relations. The other were the achievements

and the losses of the British Navy, and later the exploits of the R.A.F. Still, the poison rankled and mistrust lingered on. An echo of this could be heard in the tones in which the men of Vichy and their Press, soon after the surrender, started a niggardly dispute about how many British divisions had been promised and now many had been sent, how many the British had lost or saved during the retreat from Dunkirk and how many had again arrived on the front when the Germans continued their onslaught across the Somme and the Seine. Making England the scapegoat was an important element of French policy and propaganda in post-armistice days, and one which appealed to certain widespread feelings.

We have seen, in previous chapters, how social and political elements combined to weaken France's moral and physical resistance. We have noted the part which industrial backwardness played in the tragedy. We have looked at the geographical and strategical circumstances which made for her defeat. We have still to examine the rôle of the military element proper, to determine the influence of military leadership and initiative.

Here we have a very high authority to refer

to. *Candide*, a French weekly of strongly reactionary tendencies, writing three months after the armistice, quoted a phrase which the then President of the Republic, M. Albert Lebrun, is said to have uttered at Bordeaux on the eve of surrender: "Le pire c'est que les généraux ne veulent plus se battre" (The worst is that the generals do not want to fight any more). We put this phrase in as evidence before the tribunal of history. It confirms what we have said before: it was the higher ranks, the upper classes, who first threw up their hands and accepted defeat. The French generals were in the same mood as the French bourgeoisie; they did not act like soldiers keen on battle, they behaved as instruments of a class too weary to dare.

Was it treason, then, which caused the French army to flinch at the first impact of the German heavy tanks when they rushed over the bridges of the River Meuse? There is a story that someone "forgot" to blow up some of these bridges. In one of his speeches, Reynaud offered another explanation. The Meuse sector, he said, had been sparsely occupied because of the nature of the landscape and the strong natural obstacles it offered; it had been thought

impossible that the Germans would attack here. It had been thought impossible! Here is the clue to the whole problem. In fact, the Germans did attack, and quickly succeeded; they followed this up, a little farther south, by breaking through exactly at the end of the Maginot Line, on the point on which the whole of the Franco-British army which had entered Belgium relied for their pivoting movement. From this initial shock the Allies never recovered.

It had been thought impossible! The French general staff had made a thorough study of strategy, and no single move of Turenne's or Napoleon's famous battles had been left unexplored. They had also studiously learned the lessons of the war of 1914; many volumes had been written on this subject. The Paris École Militaire was a temple of serious learning, and the French military journals enjoyed a tremendous reputation. The outcome of all this had been—the Maginot Line. Here the conclusions drawn from the experiences of the last war had found their most comprehensive expression: it was indeed to be reckoned impossible that any military Power could beat this supreme effort—had the methods

and the weapons remained the same. The Maginot Line was the superlative of trench-warfare, the supreme incarnation of ideas of the last war. It remained unsurpassed. It was literally passed over.

On the other hand, the French military pundits had pooh-poohed such innovators as Reynaud and General de Gaulle when they advocated—before the war—complete and immediate motorisation. Both had put their case in able books; but they could not shake the French military *routiniers* out of their complacent repose on the laurels of 1918. It was thought impossible that the Germans would risk so much in what seemed to the orthodox military mind a hazardous experiment. Impossible that they would leave the beaten tracks to such an extent—as to win the war! It was a case of experiment versus experience, of tanks rumbling over theories, of machines tearing along against rules and routine.

No, I do not believe that amongst the French commanding officers there was a traitor. It was not as simple as that. There was inefficiency and neglect and shirking of responsibilities. There was lack of that collective genius which strict efficiency breeds even amongst lesser men, as the German war

machinery proves. There was too much liking for a comfortable life, too much fondness for a good billet, and too much annoyance at being disturbed—by the war. In this the war-lords did not differ from the civilians. Sticking to their old guns they were above all afraid to employ the daring methods which would have been needed to win this war, or at least to avert or to lessen defeat.

This could be seen when the French military leaders had to decide whether to defend Paris or not. There was a widespread belief that it could have been defended—but only by extraordinary methods, quite exceptional, unheard-of methods according to standardised thinking: in fact, methods that had not been heard of since the *levée en masse* of the French Revolution, 150 years ago.

These methods would have routed all routine. They would possibly have led beyond the established limits of the existing order. They would have meant calling up the people, the dark and dreaded masses, wholesale, brawn and brain. They would have meant ringing the tocsin in the old revolutionary suburbs of Paris. Even then they would have been by no means sure of success. But ere they risked victory by such methods the ruling classes chose defeat.

Supreme revelation of motive: At Tours, where the French Government had first been installed after leaving Paris, the Cabinet discussed the possibilities of further resistance. And it was General Weygand who declared that he had not enough reserves, because he needed the remaining troops for maintaining "order". He did not want them to fight the enemy; he wanted to use them against the French people!

But would the people of Paris have responded to a call to fight? Since the Finnish war, the adventure in Norway and the subsequent start of the attack in the West the mind of the people had undoubtedly changed. There was a marked stiffening in their attitude. They had hailed the Reynaud Government obviously in the hope that it would lift the war out of inertia and stagnation. They had been braced up by the stimulus of the first offensive in Norway. They had cast off sluggishness and followed in nerve-racking suspense the vicissitudes of the Belgian campaign. They had vibrated with the news of the growing bulge in the indented front-line, the desperate efforts to stop it and its final burst. They had fervently prayed for Dunkirk. Now that the drama drew nearer and the Germans ap-

proached, driving the throng of fugitives before them the mood of Paris had become both nervous and resolute. Their mind was in suspense: they could have been roused to exceptional deeds by the right word, the exemplary gesture; and they could be thrown back, the next moment, into the slough of despond. They might have greeted the advancing Germans with barricades and thrown iron bars from every window. As it was, the evacuation of the capital by the French troops and the unopposed entry of the Germans were the signal for a moral breakdown. It left the whole population that remained in Paris stunned and incapable of any reaction.

I shall not argue about the possible chances of barricades *versus* German tanks. This is not the point. The point is that nobody ever thought of exhorting the people of Paris to any form of resistance. It was a question of fighting spirit or no will to fight. It was a case of risking the impossible to prevent the intolerable. It was battling on or giving in.

History repeated the question a week or so later in a still more desperate situation and on a still larger scale. The Germans had crossed the Loire. Their columns advanced, pushing the retreating French before

them and cutting through the misery of millions of refugees, on every road that led to the South of France. But had not the South always been a solid bulwark of republican fortitude and strength? From the Middle Ages, when they rebelled against Popery, from the days when the volunteers of Marseilles brought the song of freedom to Paris, and later, when the peasants of the South sheltered "*les proscrits*", the victims of reaction—from these days on the people of Southern France had always prided themselves on being free men harbouring the Jacobin tradition and ready to defend liberty should it be threatened. Was this an idle boast? Could it be put to the test? In the face of the approaching enemy, with parts of the defeated French armies falling back on the South, while reserve formations filled the barracks and the bulk of the French fleet was safe in the Mediterranean, it would have been a shining act of defiance to call up the grandsons of the Jacobins, make the whole of Southern France into an armed camp and resist the invader to the last man. True, this would have been at the same time an act of amazing foolhardiness; for the French troops were already disheartened, and the millions of refugees

who had poured into the South obstructed all the roads and made any military movement extremely difficult. Again I do not argue that this adventure should nevertheless have been tried. I merely record that nobody even thought of trying it.

There is another precedent in French history not so far back that its memories might not have influenced the mood of the French ruling classes. Workers in caps and blouses had defiantly taken over the heritage of defeated generals and a bankrupt bourgeoisie and seized the guns which these had been ready to hand over to the enemy. It was in 1871. France had lost the war against Germany. Paris had gone through the agony of a siege. The Government, retreating to Versailles, had capitulated. But in Paris the National Guard, formed of artisans and workers, still stood to its arms. When it was summoned to hand over part of them, the people grew suspicious. Revolt flared up. They went out to Montmartre, where the guns stood, and dragged them back in triumph and saved them for the people. The Paris Commune was born.

It was drowned in blood by the Versailles troops while Bismarck prudently watched and helped from outside. The fighters of

the Commune were shot at dawn by the hundreds against the wall of the Père-Lachaise cemetery. The Versaillais had an ingenious method of meting out justice: whoever was found with hands grimy, from his work or from his gun, went to the wall. Every year, from that day to this, the working people of Paris marched to this wall—*le Mur des Fédérés*—to honour its victims. But the bourgeoisie, too, has not forgotten. The Third Republic, on the face of its Constitution, visibly bore the marks of its origin in a triumphant counter-revolution.

These memories had sometimes crossed my mind when I walked through the placid streets of old Montmartre, past the quaint corners which were the delight of my Paris days. Unconsciously, the memories of the Paris Commune may have passed like dim shadows through the nation's mind in the dark hour of defeat. But it would have none of it. There was a potential situation in the South of France which would have made a vast Commune possible. But there were no Communards. There were no Jacobins.

There was nothing but defeat and despair.

CHAPTER THREE : COLLAPSE

THE DEFEAT

THE rot had set in at the top. The generals "did not want to fight any more". The army was cut into pieces by the German motorised columns and thrown back amidst hopeless confusion. The generals were the first to make off, then the officers, then the men: there was a kind of hierarchy in the flight. A bitter joke went round: A motorised army means that your officers bolt in a car.

Wherever one met the retreating troops one word was on every lip, one gesture of contempt, one outspoken expression of scorn: "Damn the officers!"

Here a word must be said in justice. The professional soldier in France was no uncouth fellow, he often prided himself on having interests and tastes quite different from his *métier*; of course there were also the drill-ground bureaucrats and the brutes whom you find in every officers' mess in the world. The bulk of the officers in this war were, however, drawn from the reserve:

these were merchants, teachers, professional men of varying ages. They had followed a course of instruction in their time, and then had been called up every two years for a brief refresher course. This consisted in ordinary barrack drill or manoeuvres, but mostly in keeping alive the officers' *esprit de corps*; they would be kept together, treated to many a glass of champagne, and occasionally given a very short lecture on a military subject. The Germans trained their reserve officers like robots; the French made them feel that they were all jolly fellows. There was no apparent political bias or social discrimination; but the majority of the officers read *Gringoire* and had strong nationalist and even Fascist leanings. Sometimes the reserve officers would even be more outspoken on the side of reaction than the professionals. All this did not prevent a great many officers from doing their duty manfully and with exemplary courage. It merely explains why many others did not.

When they ran in panic, all the bonds of discipline within the French troops were broken. The men were seized with a kind of vindictive defeatism. They've left us in the lurch—no more fighting for us. . . . We've had enough of this war. . . . We're

going home! Whole battalions surrendered to a handful of Germans. I have been told how six or eight German motor-cyclists turned up by surprise at the entrance of a French barracks and told the sentry that the men could go home if they surrendered their arms; and about six hundred men did so without a murmur. There were many similar exploits of German motorised patrols which raided the country far ahead of any considerable force and could have been driven off by a few shots; but the exhortations of the French authorities not to lose your nerve if a German tank made an unexpected appearance at your doorstep proved of no avail.

The disorder soon became disaster. To give a complete picture of it is far beyond the powers of any individual writer; it beggars description even if a genius wielded the pen. Let a new Zola come and tell us about this motorised hell. Let poets and historians earn their laurels. I shall content myself with reporting a few modest testimonies.

Here is the narrative of a research worker in a world-famous Paris institute of physics:

"We had been waiting for the order to leave Paris. You know that, for a time,

the Government had forbidden all public institutions as well as private industry to evacuate the town, so as not to alarm the public. For days on end my chief clung to the telephone; at last the order came—too late. The institute possessed scientific apparatus worth many millions of francs, some of it unique in the world, for many years had gone to the construction of these instruments. To carry them to safety several hundred packing-cases and a corresponding number of lorries were needed. We got hardly one tenth of this number, and had to leave in a rush. The Germans marched in, and the next morning a man turned up at the institute and took command of it, lock, stock and barrel; he was a German scientist who previously had worked two years at the institute and knew every nail in the place. He had obviously been designed for the job a long time ago. Thus the institute—which did important research work for military purposes in many fields—was run by the Germans without a hitch within forty-eight hours. The same thing happened to many important industrial undertakings engaged in war work.”

A carpenter told me this story in his own simple words:

“ I left Paris on my bicycle the day before the Germans arrived. My wife was with child; she had been promised by the *Mairie* (the Borough Council's office) that she should be evacuated, but later was told that there were no more trains. My bicycle was stolen during the first night while I slept in a haystack; but I did not mind very much. I had already found out that I could get on quicker on the crowded roads by tramping and begging a lift wherever I could get one. On my way I have seen so many horrible sights that I can hardly recall them. In one deserted locality where the German bombers had passed I saw a human head right on the top of a makeshift obstacle in the road; I don't know whether it had been blown up there by the bombs or placed there by someone who had gone off his senses with horror. On the second day I got into the first bombardment from the air; after that there were so many that I don't know which was the worst. Once a car was hit close beside me and a woman cried terribly as blood streamed all over her. Another time I escaped by sheer miracle by clinging to a big tree and turning round as the flyers swooped down and tried to machine-gun us. The French

soldiers whom I met all along the way were very friendly. You could jump on any military lorry, and they gave plenty of food to the women, and even sweets and chocolates to the children."

And here is part of the story of a member of one of the Allied Governments who had taken refuge in France:

"I had just returned from a tour of inspection through the departments where our refugees had been billeted. With my wife were the wife and the mother of a friend, who were extremely anxious to get back to their men-folk; for the news grew more alarming with every hour. I promised to run them over to Ch. in my car. But when we had gone about half-way there was no more getting through: in D., a provincial capital, we learned that the Germans were only about 22 miles away. There was panic and confusion at the *Préfecture* and the *Mairie*, and the population was frightened; women cried in the streets and people left in a hurry. I decided nevertheless to go to bed, having been promised by the *Maire*—an old friend of mine—that he would send round to my hotel if anything happened during the night. In fact I was awakened at a quarter past midnight: 'You must

leave at once,' the *Maire* told me. I had also been promised petrol, but when I now asked for it, the army had seized all the stocks about an hour ago, and only with great difficulty did I get twenty litres [about five gallons].

"This took us to H., where we knocked at the *Sous-préfecture*. There they were busy burning heaps of documents. Another five gallons was all we could obtain. We made off for A., but on reaching the neighbourhood were just in time to see the first shells fall into it. They were followed by bombs which set the place ablaze.

"We turned sideways. By now we had got into the stream of desperate people fleeing from their homes; it took us until noon next day to cover about 25 miles. This human misery now engulfed us, surging around us in shifting waves; there was no escaping it. Roads were blocked, and sometimes there was nothing to do but turn back; only occasionally would a sentry be impressed by the C.D. (Corps Diplomatique) on my car, and let us pass where others were held up. Soon we got into a nasty hole, the Germans firing over our heads into S. We had to get out and take cover in the ditches. There we lay for

several hours while machine-guns also got busy in our neighbourhood. When dusk came, we continued our journey, but only to run into more calamities.

“It was the next day that our car broke down in the midst of a noisy scene. To our right and left firing was going on. I sent the ladies away with a friend, and the chauffeur and I tried to repair the car. While we were waiting for the motor to cool down I witnessed many strange scenes—scenes from the *débâcle* of the French army. Algerian soldiers came up and ‘borrowed’ some of our tools; when we asked them back, they threatened us with their rifles. French soldiers passed us in little groups as they retreated from the scattered front-line which was gradually pushed back; they were all in a mutinous mood. I saw some of them hold up an officer and tear off his stripes. I saw others placing a lorry right across the road so as to hold up all traffic, then get off and take to the woods. When we had spent the best part of two hours trying in vain to get our car on the move, I decided there was nothing to be done but abandon it and get away as best we could. We walked for a while through the woods, and then along the road again, when a stray

taxi turned up. For one hundred francs the driver took us to the next town, where we got another vehicle.

“We reached M., where our compatriots had installed an important centre, including all kinds of welfare institutions, but everybody was gone. While we still enquired about this and that, there was running and shouting and a sudden cry went up: ‘The Germans are here!’ About 150 yards down the road half a dozen German motor-cyclists had made a surprise appearance. Shots were fired, and two Germans fell dead, the rest turned tail and wheeled off. But we, too, felt like getting away quickly. We went on the search for a car. In one of the parking places stood one of our compatriots’ ambulances. Wounded women were inside, and also a man, but it had no driver to it. My chauffeur and I took his place, and away we went with the Red Cross flying.

“It was not an easy get-away. We passed many wounded, who on seeing an ambulance hoped to be taken away. But we had neither doctor nor nurse, and our car was full up already: so we had to be deaf to all appeals and leave the poor souls crying for help. We came to B. Someone signalled us to stop and told us that we

could not go any farther: they were just going to blow up the bridge. I started pleading, but this only lost us time. 'Drive on like hell!' I shouted to the chauffeur, and ahead we went amidst some frantic waving—over the bridge. Behind our backs a deafening explosion told us that we had crossed it in the nick of time.

"After many further adventures we reached T., a big town (we had already deposited the wounded). I went to the *Préfecture* to enquire where I could find the other members of our Government. During our conversation the *Sous-préfet* aired his views about the situation with amazing frankness. 'Don't you see,' he said, 'we are in the midst of a revolution? Of course I don't like the Germans coming here and occupying the whole of France. But still, Hitler stands for private property, does he not? I prefer his system to Bolshevism. I am a land-owner, you see; and the land will remain, boches or no boches. Above all I am against Bolshevism.'

"Our journey in search of my Government colleagues went on. They had been seen here or known to be there, but when we went to that place they had gone. Telephone communications were unobtainable;

each Département formed a separate province living under its own laws. Conditions differed widely from one to another and some prefects openly scoffed at their neighbour's orders. Meanwhile we had got used to our wandering life and in our ambulance toured one half of unoccupied France.

"We came to Bordeaux, and there was a heavy air-bombardment that day. We reached Bayonne, and there, as everywhere, was disorder and misery. Finally we came to Hendaye, and there was the Spanish frontier right in front of us, but we were turned back from the 'International Bridge' because I had not got a Spanish visa. Back we went to the Spanish Consulate in town; but although I kept thumping away on their front door, they would not open. Around the building there was a motley crowd, some of them well-dressed, others wretched, some mad with fright and in tears, waiting at the doorstep for paradise or hell. From them we learned that the officials at the Consulate were there all right, but that only 'special cases'—people who had very good friends or plenty of money—were admitted. After a while, in fact, the door opened and a fat man was reverently led out. No sooner had he passed than I put my

foot between the door and the threshold, and however much the official inside protested and shouted, I did not move, but held my diplomatic passport under his nose. At last he took it and retired. An hour went by. Again the door opened and the scene repeated itself: I put my foot inside, ignored the shouting, and finally got my passport stamped. This is how I got out of France."

The reader may be tired by now of so many scenes which any reporter could make more colourful, but which only life itself could make as trivial and as tragic. There was some heroism in them and much senseless suffering. And this is how France suffered defeat.

The same story was told over and over again in a new kind of publicity which made its appearance in the French papers: they carried whole columns of little advertisements of people seeking their relatives. The country had been cut in two, and for many weeks there were no communications, postal or otherwise, between the two halves. Millions of Frenchmen had been driven from their homes; families had been torn asunder and dispersed by the blind fury of a bombardment; men had lost their wives, mothers

their children. There were millions who did not know whether their beloved ones were dead or alive. Your brother might be in the next village and you would not know it. Your husband or your son might be a prisoner in Germany or in the occupied zone, or he might have had the luck to escape to the non-occupied territory—but then he, on his side, did not know where to find you. This complete disintegration of the family was one of the worst features of the drama. It annihilated the private life and happiness of millions of people, and millions of individual tragedies will spring from it for years to come.

Let me conclude by one more story, a very short one. At the *Préfecture* in A. a foreigner showed his passport and visa. The official looked at him. "You're a lucky one," he said. "It won't be long before we Frenchmen, too, will want a thing like that."

SELF-CASTIGATION

The news that France had asked for an armistice came as a terrible shock. It was followed by days of agony while Hitler took his time first to accept the request, then to stage the arrangements, to fix the conditions and to extort their acceptance. For days

on end the French radio kept repeating that the plenipotentiaries had left at such and such time, that nothing was known about the negotiations, that the public was requested to show patience and fortitude and that they hoped to be able to give more news later . . . and for the twentieth time they repeated a record of old Pétain's speech in his quavering tones, and the "Marseillaise" at the end sounded like blatant blasphemy. The news that the armistice had at last been signed drew a sigh of relief from millions of exhausted souls. When, two days later, the conditions were published, general exhaustion had become general resignation.

It was a complex sentiment. People were at the same time stunned, rebellious and utterly tired of the war. In bewilderment and in disgust they turned away from the idols they had hitherto worshipped. Something like a wave of psychic self-castigation swept over France. Criticism was wild, diffuse and often unjust.

You could not enter a bus or a train at that time (that is, if they were running) without being at once immersed in a heated argument in which everybody took part. People spoke freely, and since every French-

nan is a born orator, these public discussions were extremely interesting.

I often spoke to an industrialist from Northern France, a refugee who was housed next door to the little farmhouse where I had found shelter. He looked the typical French bourgeois, and spoke like a gramophone record of average middle-class opinion. He came from a family of nine, and had seven children himself, two sons serving with the forces. And did he like to talk!

Politics and the politicians, that is what ruined France, he would tell me. Too much egoism, don't you see? too much wire-pulling and all that. Well, they are done for now, and serve them right. We don't want politics, Monsieur—what we want is honest work. Our workpeople would not work any more—all pampered and spoiled. Didn't they have under the Front Populaire a Ministry for Recreation (he meant the Under-secretary of State for Sports and Recreation, who made an excellent job of it)—a Minister for Recreation, I ask you! Not that I was against the workers, mind you. I have always been a father to the honest ones amongst my workpeople, the elder ones who are settled with a little home and a family. The family, you see, that is

what counts. . . . Naturally he did not like "the boches", but he would never believe that they could really dominate France. All that would be only temporary; they were not clever enough to curb the genius of France. As to M. Laval, he had much to say for him—a clever man—and he was prepared to bet, Laval would see the thing through. France should have taken his advice a long time ago and made friends with Mussolini—a clever man, too—but the politicians, with their ideologies, would have none of it. On the other hand, he did not like the British, not at all; nobody really liked them in France. Hadn't they helped Hitler to get where he was now? And they were not ready for war; they simply relied on France. And they had not sent enough troops; they had let the French down. And, moreover, they were no good soldiers; he knew that—nothing like our boys to stick it under heavy fire. They were callous business-men, the gentlemen from the City; that's what they were. . . . And so the genius of middle-class France would rattle on.

Then there was the barber in the little town I went to. He soon reminded me of his Paris colleague who had set me wondering by his outburst against the Front Popu-

laire. This man, too, ran a one-man shop, and was a very talkative fellow. "*Le régime du fainéantisme*" (the reign of laziness), he called it, and he was not sorry this was over now. It was a severe lesson that had been administered to France, but they had deserved it. Had not the workers thought they could run the show, and the owner had nothing to say any more in his own house? And wasn't it the same thing with the State? That thing had got to be changed. Now the owner would be the master again, and so would the State, and the workers would have to work. . . .

Well roared, master barber! This exactly is the meaning of any new régime like the French. The boss should be boss again.

The current ran deep. It swept to the surface odd kinds of reactions and resentments. It brought up the residue: ill-digested bits of German propaganda and the dregs of reactionary agitation. The shock had been terrible. It made France giddy. She abandoned herself to a wave of loose sentiment and despair. And out of all this there arose the cry: "A new order!"

The people of France did not really know what that meant. They did not really know what they wanted. They did not even

believe it was as serious as all that—and they were already on the slippery slope sliding down into dictatorship. If that could be called a renewal, then it was a re-birth in the midst of a fainting fit.

Reaction seized its opportunity. *Gringoire* and the like reaped the harvest of years of mud-raking. The slogans against the “old system” and “parliamentary corruption” that had helped to pave the way for Hitler in Germany served again. And here was the new order, ready and fitting. Better have it while it's nice and hot!

The forces of the Left were entirely disorganised; democratic institutions were discredited. Thus the rebellious mood in which the soldiers came back was soon twisted and turned. A revolutionary situation which had all but emerged from defeat was changed into victory for counter-revolution. There is a lesson to be learned from this: no revolution is possible in Europe as long as Hitler is strong.

This is the main reason behind the new order in France: its *raison d'être* is the existence of German Fascism. This was never quite clear to the French people; yet it became transparent in more ways than one. Were not the “new men” precisely those

old ones who had opposed the war against Germany? Did they not boast of it now and denounce, in best Fifth-Column style, their opponents of the Left as war-mongers and *jusqu'aboutistes* (die-hards)? These were the men who now seized the reins while a nation stood numbed.

But more than to any other reason the new régime in France owes its easy victory to a piece of shameless deceit. It made people believe that by emulating their conquerors they would buy Hitler's mercy and lessen the hardships of defeat. This was a lie. Soon the German radio and the Nazi Press started to warn the French "democrats" that they should not hope to escape their just punishment merely by putting up an old warrior as a shield and by disguising themselves with a little fascist make-up. They were even ridiculed for overdoing the imitation.

But the French "democrats" were ready to take the plunge. The French nation, confused, deceived and distressed, was ready to pay with its liberty—a heavy price—for a little lessening of its burdens, which it never obtained.

In a bus I overheard another conversation. One man, apparently a farmer, said:

"They can't take the land, can they? France is a rich country after all. We'll have to go back to the land: there will always be bread. . . ." (This, too, alas, proved an illusion.)

"And as to the boches," the other said, "and the British and all that; well, of course, it's hard luck. But we must not be sentimental; we have got to face hard facts. It may be painful, but—better go the whole hog."

And France went the whole hog.

IN VICHY

This is no "inside-story" of so-called revelations and doubtful gossip. It is an eye-witness account by one who has lived through those tragic months in France.

I shall now refer the reader to another witness of particularly intimate knowledge. The following is an account given to me by a deputy to the French Chamber who went to Vichy when the French Parliament was summoned there to write out its own death-warrant. He is a moderate of the Left, a fine scholar and one of the truest friends any man can have.

He knew nothing when he set out for

Vichy, he said. The broadcasts had been stopped after the armistice. The papers, miserable two-page sheets produced in make-shift printing-shops, contained nothing but official stuff. France had been kept in complete ignorance of what had really happened in those momentous days since the Government had left Paris. As for himself, he had hardly left his constituency; once he tried to get to Bordeaux (where the Government then was), but was stopped at the boundary of his Département.

So the first thing he tried to do was to get reliable information about what had been going on in the councils of the Government. Here is a honest summary of what he has been able to gather.

Soon after the Reynaud Government had moved to Bordeaux it became clear that the military situation was going from bad to worse. Reynaud decided that the Government should leave for North Africa, abandoning Metropolitan France altogether. To lessen the difficulties of transport—the whole of the central administration, civil and military, as well as Parliament, were to be brought over—the Government gave orders that a ship, the *Massilia*, should proceed directly from Bordeaux to an African port.

A number of members of both Houses availed themselves of this opportunity; they included such well-known personalities as Georges Mandel, then Minister of the Interior, Daladier and Jean Zay, both former Ministers, and many others. This is the origin of the famous case of the *Massilia* of which so much was heard later, the men who left by order of the Government of the day being treated as deserters and rebels. About this Herriot alone (the President of the French Chamber) was decent enough to utter a word of protest before the Assembly.

All this proves that at least the War Cabinet (which included Marshal Pétain) was at one time determined to leave France and continue the war.

At a full Cabinet meeting at Bordeaux, Reynaud laid the plan before his colleagues. It was then that Marshal Pétain, the patriotic figure-head of the defeatist clique, opened his mouth and refused to follow the Prime Minister. "*Je ne marche pas*" (I won't go), were his words. Reynaud, baffled, put the question formally. The voting was twelve for and thirteen against.

Reynaud took his resignation to the President of the Republic. M. Lebrun, however, would not easily accept it. He suggested

that Reynaud and Pétain should exchange posts, the Marshal taking the Premiership and Reynaud remaining as Vice-Premier. This Reynaud refused. Still the situation was confused. The capitulation grew out of a muddle.¹

¹ There had been (as I heard later) an alternative plan proposed by Georges Mandel, the then Minister of the Interior, to transfer the Government to Brittany from whence it could be brought over to England in an extremity. This plan, it was said, was abandoned under the influence of Reynaud's lady friend (who had also been instrumental in bringing the defeatist Baudouin into the Government). I cannot vouch for this part of the story; but I am prepared to accept the symptomatic implications which it contains: that defeatist influences may have been at work in the very bedrooms of the leaders of the French bourgeoisie.

There was, later, another interesting incident. During the days of agony while Hitler kept the French plenipotentiaries waiting, there was one moment when even the first Pétain Government decided that there was nothing but to go to North Africa. This decision was taken (as another friend who happened to be on the spot has since told me) on the 20th of June and it remained in force during a few hours. It was then that the road from Bordeaux to the Mediterranean was cleared for the Government and all the hotels in Perpignan requisitioned for its temporary stay. This decision reached the ears of Laval who was then not yet a member of the Government; and he and Marquet hastily summoned their friends and passed a resolution plainly hinting at the plan and denouncing it ("One cannot defend one's country by leaving its soil"). But, more important, Laval also passed word to M. Lequerica, the Spanish

But the defeatists had had their way.

[Readers will remember that we have mentioned the fact that a Pétain-Laval Government was already canvassed some time before the war. Now it is significant that on the day of Reynaud's resignation some papers came out with a list of the future Cabinet, which contained the names of Pétain, Laval, Bonnet, Marquet and Paul Faure—the original cast of the inveterate “Munichois”, the men to make peace at any price. This was changed in later editions, and another list given which contained, in addition to some of Reynaud's less prominent Ministers, mainly the names of some military leaders.]

Three days later, continued my friend, the new Cabinet met. Two gentlemen turned up, MM. Laval and Marquet. “Another deputation”, remarked one of the Ministers innocently. The meeting opened. The two gentlemen sat down at the table, and Pétain announced that they had just been made Ministers, Laval taking the post of Vice-Premier. Then, for a time, every day brought another change: a minor reshuffle

Ambassador; and through the Spanish Government Hitler learnt of the intention of the French. Thereupon, he agreed to open the negotiations.

of the Government, a purge of the administration from all those who were suspected of "Left" tendencies or pro-British sympathies, or who were merely known to have been opposed to surrender. The administrative muddle grew: every decree dealing with the most vital problems—such as transport, food supply or the millions of refugees who overcrowded the non-occupied territory—was sure to be cancelled next day by another decree. It was in the midst of this mess that Parliament assembled.

There were, of course, the constitutional difficulties: it was at any rate a mere rump-Parliament that was got together. The Government seemed afraid lest they should not get a majority at all, or one which would be too visibly scraped together. They accordingly resorted to all means of moral pressure.

The air was thick with intimidation and the atmosphere distinctly hostile to everything that belonged to the recent past. Past ideals, which nobody dared to defend, were dropped into a yawning vacuum: a nation in despair buried its own past. And the more people were ashamed of themselves, the more they turned their wrath on the scapegoats ready at hand.

The economic outlook was truly desperate. They were told in committee that the war-damages which France had undertaken to repair amounted to about 1000 milliards of francs. The cost of the German army of occupation was equally to be borne by France; of the organised plundering of all her resources which this occupation meant they had as yet only a faint idea. But the enormous difficulties of transport and food supply were already very much in evidence, and everybody was upset about it.

It was on this situation that Laval, the spokesman of the Government, mainly dwelt when he presented their case. To cope with this calamitous emergency there must be a strong Government unhampered by legal niceties and with full powers. This Government had to deal with Hitler and Mussolini; therefore it must be composed of men who were supple enough—he obviously spoke of himself—and acceptable to the dictators. It must be “possible according to present European circumstances”.

Thus he rubbed it in that if France chose to emulate Hitler in shaping her future régime, she might win the dictator's mercy. At the same time, however, he gave his hearers to understand that he by no means

intended to push the country headlong into a full-fledged dictatorship. No, they did not want that. They were steering a cautious course, trying not to offend the victor in the hope of avoiding further German demands. They did not want to see a "Gauleiter" installed in their place, any more than they wanted a hundred per cent. fascist like Doriot (who conveniently hovered in the offing) to seize his chance.

The majority, including many Socialists, swallowed it all. They did not feel happy about it but they meant to make the best of a thoroughly bad situation. After all, it seemed true that this was not a Government of the extreme fascist variety; there was no smell of violence about it, and whatever would have to be done against this class or that, Laval had promised to do gently. . . . Better do the inevitable yourself, therefore, than see it done against you. The old fallacious idea of the lesser evil prevailed.

They had been led to believe that reaction was to be moderate. They had no clear idea of what was to be done nor of what lay ahead. They had also been led to believe that this was merely an emergency construction destined to meet a painful exigency and that it was not going to last. They

would just muddle through; and some people secretly hoped that, after a time, somehow or other they would find the way back to the old easy-going routine. With this idea in mind they voted for the "new order". Some abstained. The Government got a big majority.

Other people had other excuses as well—or thought they had, or rather looked for them to silence their own pangs of conscience. There were persistent rumours that if the necessary majority were not obtained all the deputies of the Left would at once be arrested; General Weygand, it was said, had everything in readiness for a military *coup d'état*. He did not believe these rumours, added my friend. Still, Weygand is a sinister figure: a bigoted Roman Catholic, prompt and silent, and one remembers how he was up to the neck in the affair of the Cagoulards.

In the Assembly itself there were few incidents, although it was not so dull as the official reports in the papers made it appear. Léon Blum was there, despite rumours that he had left France, defying the menaces that had been hurled at him. These had actually led to some hostile incidents in public, while on one occasion, at least, the Government declared that it could not guarantee his

personal safety. A fascist deputy, Vallat, made a personal attack on Reynaud.

In committee some of the Government's plans were revealed. As regards the new constitution, Laval promised that it should not be entirely "authoritarian": some trace of universal suffrage should be left. He also said that the Government did not accept a "racial" point of view and that they would continue to protect foreign refugees in France.

[These statements were lies. Soon after there began the discrimination between "true" Frenchmen—born of French parents—and those who had acquired French nationality by naturalisation; they are now banned from the civil service and can be de-naturalised. At the same time official French propaganda took on a marked anti-Jewish note. As regards the foreigners, France had already subscribed to that shameful clause in the armistice that she would hand over to the Nazis all the Germans whose extradition Hitler should demand—to have them tortured to death in concentration camps. To make sure that this obligation should be duly carried out the Pétain Government decided soon after that no German or Austrian refugee should be

allowed to leave the country. This was the reward for those who had put their faith in France and often fought for her.]

In committee Laval also lifted the veil from his conceptions of foreign policy. He did not like the Germans, it seemed, but he banked on Mussolini. Under present circumstances, he said, a realist vision of a future Europe would have to reckon with three great power-spheres: the U.S.S.R., the continent under German rule, and on the western and south-western borders a Latin Block formed of Italy, France and Spain—to counterbalance Hitler's power. It was for this that he, Laval, was striving. As for Britain, which obviously did not fit into his scheme, he seemed to detest the British more than the Nazis. He actually spoke of the "gang of fools and criminals" (*cette bande de fous et de criminels*) which ruled in London.

Here we may leave my friend's report from Vichy.

Staggering under the blow of the invasion, France accepted defeat. A demoralised army, a discouraged people, an utterly disorganised country was cowed and deluded into submission. So great was the confusion that in the fateful division even

Socialists who had not been "Munichois" actually voted for the "new constitution". It was not an act of conscious and wilful complicity; this was to come later. It was helpless acquiescence, a feeling of "what could we do otherwise?", the natural result of the mood in which the war had been conducted and lost. It was panic and passivity—which, no doubt, many of those who had allowed it to get the better of them soon regretted.

During the war the French Parliament had consented to being shockingly ignored by Daladier. It had made no attempt to assert itself under Reynaud; it had failed to defend not only the people's rights, but its own. It was now called upon to vote its own abolition, and did so without demur. France turned away from her heritage of liberty without really knowing what she did. Only those who pulled the strings knew what it meant and willed it and acted; the others just voted in fear. It was all done in a mist which clouded the real decision. It was all due to a shock which upset clear vision. French democracy died ignobly at its own hands. And at the inquest of history the finding will have to be recorded: Suicide while of unsound mind.

This death of a democracy lacked dignity of drama. It was not without certain pungent sadness. Yet at Vichy nobody got up to say to the new master: "You are here because Hitler is here. You will rule as long as his rule lasts—not an hour longer. You will be wiped off together with him!"

These words were not heard at Vichy. Nobody dared to spit them at the traitor.

THE MEN AROUND THE MARSHAL

The traitors—the new masters—the men of Vichy: who were they?

Marshal Pétain is the first in rank, but not in importance. The Marshal is a very old man. At Vichy he has never been more than a figure-head.

All the efforts to make "the victor of Verdun" appear to-day as a man of sharp thinking and vigorous decisions are just much humbug. All the photographs which show him as he pats little children on the head, or talks to old peasants, all the sentimental stories about his modest and strenuous way of life—all this is sheer propaganda, artificial and clumsy, and the more awkward as it betrays the painful exertions of official legend-building: you can see swe-

ing journalists toiling and fretting over the task to make a dry old man look a genial father of his people. For all we know, this may not be to the old man's liking; he may be modest in his heart, as he is probably honest in believing that he is serving his country.

The Marshal has certainly been immensely popular. But the popularity of this old man has been shamelessly misused. Soon his defenders started pleading that he had willed for the best, that he had made a tremendous sacrifice in undertaking, at eighty-four, a thoroughly unpleasant job and that he could not be held responsible for the misdeeds of incompetent advisers. One may assume that popularity must fade as soon as the people feel the weakness under the assumed appearance of strength. And no man, however strong, could really retain the love of the people of France once it is realised that he has brought France under the German heel.

In more than one way Marshal Pétain bears a striking resemblance to Marshal Hindenburg. Both were persuaded in their old age by evil advisers and by their own narrow way of thinking to sacrifice their country to the interests of class or caste.

Twice in his life Hitler has had the good fortune to encounter an old warrior who surrendered to him: the first gave him Germany, from the second he won France.

Poor France! Is it not highly significant that her "strong man" in her darkest hour should be a feeble old man of eighty-four?

It is just as significant that the "moral revival" which the new régime so zealously advocates should take place under the actual leadership of the most unscrupulous and cynical of her corrupt wire-pullers: M. Laval.

Pierre Laval has been in politics for many years—and he has made a fortune out of it. He started as a little lawyer in a Paris suburb and, like many other leaders of the French bourgeoisie, as a very "Red" Socialist. In 1919 his name stood on the same list of candidates as that of the late Jean Longuet.

He left the Socialist Party soon after, but remained mayor of Aubervilliers, a working-class suburb of Paris. There he could be seen, with his sleek black hair, his dark complexion and his famous white necktie, "having one" with his many working-class electors, patting them on the back, calling them by their Christian names, occasionally

protecting them against the police and being considered a real chum.

He rose to great prominence. He has been many times a Minister, several times Premier. He had a rousing reception when he came to America as France's envoy for the settlement of the War-Debt quarrel. He wrecked the League of Nations to save Italy from the sanctions she had incurred over Abyssinia: he had voted with the others, then went home and brought about the Hoare-Laval plan of inglorious memory—and ever since he has remained Mussolini's henchmen in France. He also negotiated and signed the Franco-Russian alliance. At one of his diplomatic visits a harassed foreign statesman said to his secretary: "For God's sake look up this Auber-villiers. Must be a biggish place, but I can't find it on the map. He keeps telling me about it. . . ."

Pierre Laval is a wily politician, sly and assiduous, adroit in handling men, an accomplished liar. He will bring people round by letting them understand they need not think he meant it as seriously as all that. He is a master of hints and winks, of half-spoken words and half-retracted promises. In France they have a single word for all

that: Laval is an Auvergnat. Indeed, the men from the Auvergne district in Central France have a great reputation for being cunning and tenacious; and none of them has ever been found to despise money.

Among the men of Vichy, during the first period, Laval stood out. He did the big things in his far-from-big-manner, uncere- moniously yet obviously liking the limelight. When he entered the Pétain Government he was accompanied by another man who seemed to have little enough character and quite enough ambition for the making of a great career, but who soon lost pace and was dropped overboard: Adrien Marquet. Like Laval, Marquet came from the Socialist Party; he left it at a much later date, in 1934, as one of the leaders of the dissident "Neo-Socialists" whose programme he put into the words: "*ordre, autorité, nation*"— which definitely smelt of Nazi contamination. Like Laval, he had won a reputation as mayor of the big town of Bordeaux. He is a handsome man, and knows it, a man of shallow feelings and voluble speech. He had long coveted a seat in the Government; he would certainly have preferred to have been more comfortably seated.

The third of the renegades who played a

leading part at Vichy was Marcel Déat. He had left the Socialist Party together with Marquet to become the general secretary and leading brain of the Neo-Socialists. He had been driven from the party by his burning ambition and by his no less burning hatred of Léon Blum. Since then, Déat has been known to oppose every single issue, big or small, which he thought Léon Blum would back. This kind of mania—a phobia directed against a once-adored political leader or “father”—is an interesting phenomenon which has been noticed in other cases as well. And Marcel Déat could bide his time.

He drifted into several camps. He came out for the “planism” of Henri de Man—the Belgian Socialist leader whose “Neo-Socialism”, intellectually at first but very tangibly at last, became a Neo-Fascism. He stood for a national socialism of his own planning. He became later—in opposition to Léon Blum—one of the most prominent defeatists. It was he who wrote, on the eve of the outbreak of war, the famous article “Mourir pour Dantzig?” (Shall we die for Danzig?). It appeared in *L'Oeuvre*, the one-time Radical paper which turned “pacifist”, and of which Déat has now made his mouthpiece.

This gifted young *normalien*,¹ an excellent orator and highly intellectual writer, has now become a very influential man. His is a planning, scheming mind; he has brilliant ideas, but no inkling for practical, constructive work. He can draw up schemes; he cannot carry them out. As secretary of the Neo-Socialist group his wilful ways set everybody against him; his too-brilliant brain nearly killed the organisation. Now he is scheming behind the scenes at Vichy. He drew up a memorandum on the economic reconstruction of France and Europe based on Franco-German co-operation and implementing Hitler's "new order". This memorandum was very well received in Berlin. Déat moved into a leading position within the "German party" at Vichy.

His influence has probably also been instrumental in bringing into the Government, as Minister for Labour, René Belin, the former Trade Union leader whom we remember as the editor of *Syndicats* and the leading brain of the anti-Communist, anti-war group within the C.G.T. Like Déat, he had not to give up many of his convictions on accepting office at Vichy: he had

¹ Secondary teacher educated at the *École Normale Supérieure*, one of France's most famous High Schools.

always stood for a "revised democracy". Upon him now devolved the duty of suppressing the free Trade Union movement, liquidating the institution of which he had been a leader and making the workers accept a thoroughly reduced status within a "corporate system".

A little incident preceded his appointment, highly illustrative of the way in which the new régime chose its collaborators. Actually another Minister of Labour had been proposed by some of Pétain's conservative friends, accepted and designated, and his name had already got into the papers—a big industrialist from Lorraine. Unfortunately this man had a namesake who was a crook, and since both were practically unknown, there was a moment of awkward confusion while nobody knew whether the capitalist or the crook had been made a Minister. Protests were being received and embarrassed enquiries made. When Pétain heard of the confusion he got annoyed and declared he would have neither of the two—and he sent for Belin.

There is not much difference in the way in which other Vichy Ministers were appointed. One actually got his job because he had played cards with the Marshal for

years. They were all reliable reactionaries and sufficiently unimportant not to stand in the way of Laval's ambitions. Some of these nullities were dropped again after a while and others put into their places.

They had all been Silent Columnists of the unobtrusive type, class-conscious Conservatives. There were, in addition, two more prominent henchmen. One was the former deputy Ybarnégaray, first lieutenant of the Fascist leader, De la Rocque. He was made Minister for "Social Welfare, Family and Youth", and started pressing the young men of France—gently at first—into blue shirts and into Labour camps. In spite of these efforts to ape the conquerors, he, too, was later dismissed, either because his nationalist feelings did not find favour with the Germans or, as some believed, because Vichy wanted to get rid of anybody who had once sat in a democratic parliament; or else, most likely, because of clan-jealousy and internal rivalries which were much in evidence at Vichy.

With more luck or more dexterity, Baudouin, as Foreign Minister, stayed on and, for a time, even rose in the councils of Vichy, becoming specially noticeable by his spiteful anti-British speeches. He is a typical

financier who had long been associated with the very secret diplomacy of Bonnet and "appeasement"—a second-rate brain, but a first-rate Fifth-Columnist. However, it must be said in fairness: neither of these men, Ybarnégaray and Baudouin, were Ministers of Laval's making. They had been brought into the Government by Reynaud, as Weygand and Pétain himself had been. To have opened the door to these grave-diggers of democracy is a stain on Reynaud's record about which many French democrats feel strongly. To the dispassionate observer their continuance in office was only one more proof of the fact that Vichy was neither a complete break with the past nor yet an entirely fortuitous happening. Some of the men of Vichy had been Ministers before. Some of the traitors had ruled France during the war.

CHAPTER FOUR : CHANGED FRANCE

THE NEW RÉGIME

THE new régime, as we have seen, had been got under way with the help, mainly, of three false pretences. One was that you could buy the conquerors' mercy by making your Government look like a copy of his own. It soon became obvious that this prostration was as ineffective as it was immoral. Continuous German interference made the men of Vichy sit very uncomfortably in their seats. It made them appear as deceived deceivers, as tools and traitors who, in addition, had been fools. Their Government, under increasing Nazi pressure, underwent repeated reshuffling; it was generally expected, however, that one day it might be curtly dismissed to make room for yet more adaptable Nazi puppets.

The second means of deceit consisted in making Britain the scape-goat. This, at the beginning, succeeded only too well. So much so that the sensational and generous offer which Mr. Churchill made on June 16th, to pool the forces as well as the in-

stitutions of the French and British Empires—the failing forces of France and those, still erect, of Britain—fell flat, and indeed made no impression at all. There are many Frenchmen, probably the great majority of the French people, who to this very day have not even heard of this momentous proposal.

The third device was to have the new régime accepted as a provisional solution, in no sense permanent, yet strong enough to deal with a national emergency. Democracy has collapsed, the argument ran, so something has to be put in its place. Let us set up this something without hesitation; there will be time later to fill in the gaps. And since this makeshift house has got to be constructed, better be in it than left outside in the cold.

That was how the Vichy régime saw the light. But what was this régime like?

It is important to distinguish between the French people who, dazed by defeat, had lost itself in self-humiliation and the new system which sprang out of this convulsive collapse. For one confused moment only, the two had been at one. An instant later they began to drift apart. Indeed, no sooner had the vague desire for a new order be-

gotten the Government of defeat than one thing became increasingly apparent: this régime lacked popular support. It had no backing from the masses.

Similar systems, boasting of ostensible strength but standing on feet of clay, had been in existence elsewhere—for a limited time. Dollfuss in Austria, King Carol in Rumania had attempted such precarious creations: in a time of national danger they had imposed on their people a haphazard system of confused makeshifts which vainly tried to shape itself into a durable order. And only after having imposed it, did they try to create a "movement" to support it. Their movements had banners and uniforms and privileges and they copied Nazi rites—yet they remained a sham, an artificial creation, a still-born, lifeless thing.

All these régimes, whatever their particular complexion, constitute but the backwash which the great wave of Fascism casts up on neighbouring shores—and they disappear again when the real waves come rolling along, engulfing the foamy bubbles and battering the rocks. They have no strength to withstand.

This distinguishes them from genuine Fascism: they are dictatorships with nothing

behind them. They abolish democracy without substituting for it even the mock-appearance of popular approval which is one of the essential elements of Fascism. These systems are therefore "authoritarian", not totalitarian. It is interesting to note how during the present war the institution of such régimes in the wake of Nazi victories has been progressing. These vassal-dictatorships and Fifth-Column Governments have been imposed with varying success in Hungary and in Rumania, in Norway, Holland, Belgium and France. They may be widely different from one another; they are alike in that they entirely depend for their existence on that of Nazi-Fascism itself. The future historian of our epoch will have to note this fact: not only have terror and enslavement been made the principal articles of exportation, but the dictatorial régimes which mark the advance of Fascism across Europe are nowhere home-grown. They are foreign-made, imposed from outside, led and supported by hirelings of an alien power. Some of them cannot even pretend to a show of mass-support; they rely exclusively on foreign bayonets. The whole of the seemingly grandiose progress of the Fascist "idea" thus turns out to be a

specious victory: it is based solely on Germany's military power. Smash this power and you have done away with all its abortive outgrowth. To bring down Hitler means indeed to liberate a continent; and, conversely, there can be no rebirth of liberty, no progress for humanity, nor any advance of Labour and progressive forces in any country until this one and principal bastion of international reaction is stormed and destroyed. There is no room for revolution in this continent, nor time for it in this era, unless it be first and foremost a revolution against Hitler. This France has made more abundantly clear than ever: defeat could have brought revolution, it brought counter-revolution instead—because there was Hitler.

The closest parallel to the new régime in France is to be found in Austria under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg. Here, as there, a rump parliament voted its own death and the end of democracy. Here, as there, the régime lacked any popular basis, and all efforts subsequently to create a regimented movement to support it proved unavailing. Here, as there, freedom of speech and Press were abolished, the rights of the individual curtailed, the organisations of Labour sup-

pressed and a monopoly of political direction reserved to a very small clique. There were as many speculations about the intentions in camera, as many rumours leaking out of the antechambers, as there were signs of the leaders' indecision and their internal dissensions; the lack of inner firmness contrasted sharply with the outward show of strength. Decrees were produced at alarming speed, to be amended next morning and cancelled the following day. The administration was in a state of complete collapse which turned into permanent agony.

The likeness also extends in some degree to their attitude towards the overbearing power of the Nazis. Fundamentally, neither the Austrian nor the French authoritarian régime could regard them as anything but enemies. Yet in their dealings with the Germans they constantly vacillated between timid opposition, feeble imitation and deadly concessions. To a full-fledged totalitarian sadism they opposed a half-hearted authoritarian jesuitism; to the brutal torture of body and soul a refined system of terror; to the ruthless subjugation of Labour a tentative and ill-conceived "corporative system", which never worked in Austria and probably will never materialise in

France. And whenever they had brought off a dirty deal, they turned to the world at large with a kind of moral blackmail. "Don't scold us", they seemed to say, "don't attack us; you would merely drive us entirely into the arms of the Nazis."

In expounding this parallel we do not overlook the essential differences. Austria was a weak State which had been still further weakened by a short but sanguinary civil war, when Dollfuss turned against the Socialists. France was a Great Power defeated in war by the Germans themselves. Yet there were striking similarities, in outward appearance as well as in inherent tendencies. The Pétain Government reverted to an officially sponsored catholicism just as Dollfuss had found his strongest support in the Catholic Church. The same sickening hypocrisy of official language which spoke of spiritual reconstruction and moral revival cloaked the same barrenness of ideas and the same want of social ethics. From the vast heritage of political democracy nothing had been preserved but political corruption, which thrived, rank as ever, under the uncontrolled power of petty dictators.

It might be going too far to deduce from

the fate of authoritarian Austria the future which awaits the Vichy régime. Having destroyed the live forces of its own people and turned its back on any genuine and bold reconstruction of the nation's life, it will yet learn that neither prostration nor procrastination will save it. There is no lack of successors: the Flandins, the Doriot, the real Gauleiters are ready to take its place at the conqueror's beckoning. There will be no reward for servility: it has never paid, in the long run, to be a coward and a traitor. Prostitution is never more revolting than when it fails.

Two instances particularly illustrate the spinelessness of the men of Vichy. When Laval made his first trip from Vichy to Paris (which was kept a secret at the time) he had been promised that he would meet there one of the most prominent of Hitler's lieutenants, either Goering or Hess. Actually he was met by Abetz, the spy who was to become, a few days later, German Minister to France and her real governor. Abetz gave Laval to understand that something should be done "to please the Fuehrer". He suggested two things: judicial proceedings against those who bore "the guilt of war", and stern measures against the Jews.

The order was carried out. The outcome of this meeting was the setting up of the State Court at Riom and the beginning—through the official radio at first—of an anti-Semitic campaign leading up to legislative segregation of the Jews.

This again was done haltingly, reluctantly, the hesitation merely accentuating the bad faith. Indeed, the men of Vichy had been “in” on so many rackets with Jewish financiers that it rang utterly false when their broadcasts now denounced the “Jewish” bankers who had left France for London. This was so evident that a Nazi paper, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was perfectly right when it spoke mockingly of the “anti-Semitic mimicry” of Vichy. The discrimination against the Jews which began with these propaganda-tricks has meanwhile reached a more advanced stage: a recent decree lays down the racial definition of Jewish descent, bans the Jews from the rank of officers, the civil service, the teaching profession, certain leading positions in industry and in the Press, and institutes a *numerus clausus* for the learned professions.

No less infamous was the sneaking and mendacious way in which Vichy proceeded to prosecute the persons who had been

chosen to incarnate "war-guilt". Prominent men like Reynaud, Daladier, Léon Blum, Mandel, General Gamelin and others were arrested, but the cumbersome procedure lingered. Decrees were issued to speed it up and to overcome the difficulties which the law itself placed in the way of vindictive political prosecution. Nobody seemed to know exactly what these men had been guilty of—so special laws were made to substantiate the charges. Nobody knew how to make this action tally with the most elementary requirements of judicial procedure—so the forms of justice were changed to fit the indictment. In fact, new crimes were instituted by decree in order to charge the defendants with them, and new rules laid down to circumvent the guarantees of fair trial.

All this mockery and defiance of law merely contributed to underline the odious character of the proceedings. Indeed, the charge brought against the defendants at Riom, apart from its political wickedness, is an absurd contradiction in itself. These men are accused of having been "guilty of the war"—that is to say, of having prepared for war, hastened its coming, brought war about, persisted in pursuing it and willed

its being fought "to the finish". But at the same time they are indicted for not having made sufficient preparations for the war—especially in neglecting the air-force—nor conducted it with sufficient energy. To any reasonable mind the second charge cancels the first; their contradiction demonstrates once more the pathetic confusion which reigns in the mind of the French bourgeoisie.

In the proscription of its former leaders—who, as we have seen, were men of very different opinions and character—the French nation itself suffered a grievous wrong. But even the technique of Vichy vengeance did not work too well. There was more than one hitch which added to the stains the honour of French justice has sustained. The most conspicuous of these accidents happened when General de Gaulle who now leads the Free France Movement in Britain, was (in contumaciam) "brought to justice". He was charged with desertion and treason and court-martialled. But the officers who sat on this court-martial had some feeling of comradeship left: they did less than the Government expected from them, and sentenced de Gaulle merely to four years imprisonment. Thereupon the

Government, discarding all decency, simply ordered the same case to be tried once more before the court-martial of another military district—and this time the court, no doubt more carefully selected, dutifully produced the death sentence. *Non bis in idem*—no second trial on the same charge—is one of the most elementary principles of civilised justice; it held no sway when Vichy, under orders from Berlin, dealt with free men from France.

Among the victims of Vichy one more deserves particular notice: Léon Jouhaux, the leader of the French Trade Unions. He had never been a politician; in fact, the constitution of the French T.U.C. prevented him even from accepting a parliamentary seat. Nor had he ever filled a government post, beyond being a delegate to the League of Nations' Assembly and a leading workers' delegate to the International Labour Office, where his resounding voice, voluminous like the man himself, rang through many an otherwise tedious meeting. But he had been at the head of the French workers when their industrial movement realised the gains which were made possible by the victory of the Front Populaire. He had been their leader, however moderate,

at the time of the occupation of factory premises and sit-down strikes. Revenge for the Front Populaire would not have been complete without hunting down this man.

THE END OF DEMOCRACY

In Vichy the old constitution was abolished but no new constitution put in its place. The decision merely empowered Marshal Pétain and his advisers to work it out and impose it. This has yet to be done: France has no constitution at the present time. Let the jurists enlarge on the intricacies of such a situation; for the people of France it meant that all guarantees of law and justice had gone. The rest is arbitrariness and muddle.

But the vote at Vichy achieved one thing more: it struck out the name of Republic from the charter of France. France is no longer a Republic: it is "l'Etat Français", and Marshal Pétain is "Chief of State", not President of the Republic. These are no legal niceties; it is a fundamental decision. But it does not mean, as some have been led to believe, that France has any desire to return to the Monarchy, or that even a single sane Frenchman is flirting with Royalist phantoms. It means one

thing, and one thing only: a desire to demonstrate that the ideas of 1789, against which Hitler and Mussolini stand in arms, are dead. This declaration is more than a constitutional decision; it is a moral one. It is the certificate of death of a century and a half of bourgeois democracy. It is the deed of severance of the French nation from the greatest chapter of its history. It is an attempt, however ephemeral, to undo the work of the French Revolution and to declare null and void the Rights of Man.¹

Is Laval, the evil genius of an ill-fated hour, is any other of the pygmies of Vichy, big enough to bear the responsibility for these historic misdeeds? No indeed. Nor is this mentioned here in a futile attempt to establish responsibilities or to apportion blame. It merely brings a line of events and a line of ideas to their natural conclusion. The downfall of bourgeois democracy in France is not an accident, nor is the symbolic elimination of the word

¹ It is only fitting that amongst the persons reported to have been detained by order of the Vichy Government there should be Edouard Herriot who is at the same time a true democrat, a historian of the French Revolution and, by virtue of his high office as President of the Chamber of Deputies, a guardian of constitutional rights.

Republic a mere question of form. With bourgeois democracy there dies an epoch. A chapter of history closes. An exhausted civilisation expires. It is time to look out for the things to come.

The end of parliament and democracy meant the end of the political parties. It also meant the end of the organised Labour movement in its democratic forms.

The French Socialists had been fundamentally a democratic party. They had been heirs to the great traditions of liberty which the French bourgeoisie had inherited from the Revolution; through the hands of Jacobin radicals and bourgeois liberals these had passed into the hands of the working man. The inner organisation of the Party, with proportional representation of minorities assured from the local branch up to the Party Executive, was democratic in the extreme; indeed, it was democratic to the extent of leaving too much room for discussions and dissensions, and sometimes hampering effective action. But Right and Left, majority and minority, pro-war Socialists and pacifists alike, the Socialist Party had been deeply rooted in the soil of the Republic. When democracy went down, Social-Democracy went with it. French

labour and the French Republic fell at the same time.

The party had suffered, at the hands of Vichy, one particular inimical measure: its central organ, *Le Populaire*, Léon Blum's paper, was suppressed, while all other Paris newspapers were allowed to reappear in non-occupied territory. Apart from this, however, there was at first no persecution of the Socialists. Some of their leading men were arrested in connection with the proceedings at Riom; this fate they shared with others of very different tendencies. The Socialist Party itself was banned, together with all other political parties, and it is only just to say that this formal dissolution merely confirmed an already existing fact. They had taken it for granted that they would no longer exist, and nowhere had there been the slightest resistance.

There was no room for them within the new order—for which they themselves had voted at Vichy. This was the harakiri of the French Socialists: when the majority of their Parliamentary group recorded their votes in favour without so much as a formal party protest—not even one like the declaration of the German Social-Democrats which Otto Wels read in the death-knell meeting

of the Reichstag, in March 1933, when the members of the opposition had to run the gauntlet of a double row of armed SS-men. Inglorious as had been the end of other Socialist parties, this one was more inglorious still.

It may be said (and I have said it myself) that the vote at Vichy was like the half-conscious action of a dazed man hardly responsible for his doings. It was after this that the Party fell to pieces. The fateful division which had rent it all through the war now became a split in the worst imaginable conditions. Léon Blum, morally erect as ever but intrinsically weak as ever, felt himself a defeated man: he retired. He was arrested soon after, together with several of his faithful followers. The old leaders were thus removed, and it will take some time before French Socialism will be able to evolve a new and rejuvenated leadership. It is entirely unprepared for underground action, and it will have to pay a heavy price while it learns to adapt itself to new and revolutionary conditions.

The other half of the Party's leaders had their course marked by their defeatist attitude during the war. They now completed their capitulation and became in-

corporated in the new régime of the old reaction of which they had been an appendage. They explained that they were doing this in order to protect their comrades as far as possible under the new conditions; that they were not going to leave the workers alone, but would try to secure for them a decent place within the new home; and that, of course, they would always remain Socialists. But "the old forms" were dead, and you had to march with the times and accept changes. . . . In fact, they were going over, bag and baggage.

Their leader, Paul Faure, too tired or too prudent or otherwise prevented from acting, remained in the background. It was Charles Spinasse, one of his lieutenants and a former Minister in Léon Blum's Government, who assumed the leadership, an intelligent man with affable manners and a kind of nervous intensity, but without strength. He headed "the group of the 85," under which cautious name the defeatist majority of the former Socialist Parliamentary group was loosely held together; its secretary was a young and ambitious deputy, Paul Rives. Spinasse and Rives also gave *Le Populaire*, which had died a honourable death, a dishonourable successor: a daily paper called *L'Effort*,

whose first issue appeared with the sub-heading "Socialist organ for National Reconstruction". The next day the word "Socialist" was gone.

The renegades' effort will be in vain. The Vichy régime may not at first hunt men down merely for having been Socialists; inevitably and increasingly it will be driven to put the screw on the workers' income as well as on their rights. Nor has it any need to dress up with "Left" or Socialist pretences: the Nazis will see to it that the French workers shall be kept down. Even former "democrats", however pale, are considered a nuisance; Vichy has no use for pink Socialists. Their unwanted treachery, therefore, will reap no reward. They will gain nothing but disrepute.

Thus yet another Social-Democratic Party has passed away. Like others on the Continent, it has met its doom at the hands of Fascism. Forms of defeat vary; the result is the same. Practically the whole of the International Labour movement as it had emerged during the democratic era of capitalist evolution has been wiped off the European continent: a different working-class movement will revive after the war. In France, as elsewhere, the Socialist movement

had become integrated in the democratic State; it had, of late, practised self-abnegation to the point of abdication. Its downfall, consequently, came with the military defeat of bourgeois democracy and the collapse of the State. It did not succumb in a fight of its own; it shared the death of the system which had reared it. It became "illegal" when there was no more democratic legality.

There are many French Socialists, however, who have remained true to their ideals, and once they have reorganised themselves on new lines, they may look forward to a growing following. Let me express what they feel and hope in their own words. Here is the first declaration issued by a group of intrepid French Socialists, clandestinely circulated in France and smuggled out of the country in September, 1940:

The great mass of the Socialist Party, true to the policy laid down by recent Party Congresses (at Royan, Montrouge, Nantes), condemns without quarter the members of Parliament who, on the 10th of July in Vichy, surrendered the destinies of France to Marshal Pétain, that inveterate reactionary and fascist, and to the corrupt clique of Pierre Laval. Those members of Parliament, by their vote, have placed themselves not only outside the Socialist movement but outside democracy.

The newspaper *L'Effort*, organ of Messrs.

Spinasse, Rives and other traitors, has nothing in common with Socialism and, as was proclaimed by Comrade Marx Dormoy in a statement suppressed by the censor, "cannot in any way engage the responsibility of the Socialist Party".

The undersigned wish to add that they have not waited for the war and the defeat to demand a constitutional reform which, in their opinion, should have gone far beyond the Constitution itself, and which by liberating the State from the abject tyranny of the powers of money should have assured, in the full exercise of democracy, the full development of the working class and of Socialism.

They are of opinion that the Socialist Party, for many years affected by reformism, opportunism and electioneering, is in part responsible for the increasing weakness of democracy in France; and that new methods as well as a new spirit are necessary in order that Socialism—which is not dead and will not die—shall again be capable of fulfilling its historic mission, which is one with that of the working class.

So long as the forces of exploitation, oppression and aggression exist, together with the antagonism between classes, they are determined to keep flying the flag on which is written: Abolition of classes! Emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves! International understanding and international action of national Labour movements!

Finally, the French Socialists, convinced that Britain alone in this hour defends the freedom of the world against the formidable enterprise of enslavement which Hitlerism and Fascism represent, salute British resistance with admiration. In so doing they are certain of the agreement of Frenchmen practically without exception.

However, as Socialists, they are of opinion that the war conducted by Great Britain, in order to

attain its full meaning, should set itself greater aims than the annihilation of Hitler's Reich: it should, here and now, aim at the establishment of a classless society freed from exploitation, in which the whole of mankind will find well-being and liberty.

The fate of the French Trade Unions was settled a little later. The C.G.T. (French T.U.C.) had retired to Toulouse. While it lay low, waiting for further developments, the Trade Union movement was tormented by the same currents which rent the Socialist Party. It was, moreover, affected by the appointment of one of its leading officials René Belin, to be Minister of Labour in the Vichy Government. This kindled the hope of many who were only too ready to harbour illusions. Give Belin a chance! There was a tendency to trust an old comrade, however much he had given way, even in the past, to neo-democratic, neo-Socialist ideas of Fascist inspiration. A conference of Trade Union officials, had it been held, might easily have resulted in a vote of confidence for Belin. This was avoided and the issue more or less dodged. The C.G.T. executive, however, was reorganised, leaving out Léon Jouhaux its former general secretary.

Enquiries at Vichy about what the Government intended to do with the Trade Unions

met with unfriendly answers from Laval. Now Belin set about the task of incorporating the Trade Unions in the "corporative system" which hovered shapelessly in the clouds, having at the same time to reconcile his own rather ill-defined ideas with the very definite plans of social reaction on which the masters of the hour were bent. He started, as precedents had taught him, with the Unions of public employees (which had been very strong in France), forbidding their further allegiance to the C.G.T. and bringing them under direct Government control. Next the C.G.T. was dissolved. The individual Unions were allowed to carry on but a "corporative" control was instituted in which the employers participate. There is no doubt about the further course which Belin—or his successors—will follow. The aim is the suppression of independent Trade Unionism and the institution, as in any other dictatorial country, of an authoritarian Labour organisation rigorously regimented by the Government.

A word must be said in conclusion about the French Communists. Their attitude had been that this war against Nazi-Fascism was no concern of the workers; it was not a people's war. The logical conclusion from

this argument would have been that as soon as the bourgeoisie had been defeated, as soon as the capitalist war machinery had collapsed, as soon as the workers could have taken into their own hands the nation's defence and with it the nation's destiny—that they would seize this opportunity and at least try to snatch victory out of the throes of defeat. They have done nothing of the kind.

When the Germans stood at the gates of Paris, when the whole of France and the whole of the world gasped with horror and looked for a miracle to save it from this shame, a word from Stalin setting the Red Army on the march against Berlin could have started the world-revolution indeed. When the French army, beaten and rebellious, retired behind the Loire, the Communists could have seized upon the chance of a Southern Commune. They let it go unheeded. They, like the Socialists, lost every chance there was. From the revolutionary defeatism they had preached they let only the defeat come true—not the revolution.

By this attitude the Communists showed that they had been lying when they pretended to be opposed to this war because it was led by imperialists. They were not concerned about any possibility of making war on

Hitler-Fascism to defend the French workers, even if it could be led by the workers themselves. They would not go in for a workers' war—they would only move, on Moscow's orders, if it were a Russian war. Thus, in France, their defeatism had nothing to do with any revolutionary or working-class policy; it was just ordinary Fifth-Column work—the same thing, in its results, as the policy of Laval.

UNDER THE GERMAN HEEL

But how did the people of France take it all?

It gradually awakened from its stupor—to find itself deceived, disenfranchised and miserable. It was the little scenes that revealed the people's mind.

When the British troops, in the days of the *débâcle*, marched through Nantes hurriedly to embark, there were shouts in the streets: "*Sauvez la France!*" (Save France!) That was before the darkness of defeat fell upon the unfortunate country.

A little later, a friend of mine witnessed a young girl in one of the Southern towns buy a copy of *Paris-Soir*. She gave it a glance, then with a furious gesture flung it on the ground and trampled upon it. "*C'est un*

journal boche” (It’s a boche paper), she exclaimed. She asked her money back from the seller—and so impressed was he, like all the bystanders, that he returned her the nickel.

These experiences mingled with others certainly less encouraging. In the days of retreat, wild stories about the atrocities of the approaching “Huns” had lashed the population into a frenzy of fright and driven them along in their headlong flight. When the Germans actually came, the soldiers, acting on orders, behaved quite nicely towards the French civilians. This had the intended effect: a sigh of relief went up from millions of panic-stricken people. As a rule, the first impression after the occupation was one of bewildered comfort: the Germans were not so bad after all.

This impression was widespread. You found it with Ministers at Vichy, who only later admitted that it had been erroneous and that the Nazis were no easy customers. You found it with the tradespeople, who, at first, were glad to sell their stocks to the boches at seemingly good prices (in one Southern district the price of peaches doubled within a week when transport into the occupied zone was resumed). You found it even

among refugees who had passed into the non-occupied zone after having lived for a time under German occupation.

Queerest of all were the stories of some "enemy aliens"—German and Austrian refugees—who had been left to their fate in internment camps when the Germans approached and the French guard fled, often breaking a formal pledge which had been given by the officers, not to let the internees fall into the hands of the Nazis. The feeling of these poor people can be imagined; in most cases they dispersed in panic, and sometimes succeeded, to their own astonishment, in getting through to unoccupied France. In one particular case, a camp far away in the Bretagne, this seemed hopeless, all the more since the local population took up a hostile attitude: weren't they boches after all? In all camps there had been, in fact, a sprinkling of Nazis or Alsatians with German sympathies; often these people would now take command. In this case, after days of dwindling food rations and black despair, it was decided to telephone to the next *Kommandantur*—and to ask for a German guard. This was sent, food was soon forthcoming, the camp was set in order and some restrictions were even waived. In

other camps, when the Germans took over, they let the Jews go where they liked—even return to Paris or cross into unoccupied territory. A friend of mine, an Austrian refugee who has been through all this ordeal, talked to German soldiers. He mentioned the agreeable surprise which had been caused by their correct attitude. But when he asked whether the Gestapo would behave in the same way, there was embarrassed and icy silence—a telling answer. In other cases, German soldiers themselves would tell a bewildered refugee: “Get away as long as *we* are here. Don’t wait . . .”

This, indeed, was the decisive point. Behind the “correct” German army there came the Nazi administration upon prostrate France, complete with Gestapo and requisitions and control, systematic and brutal, soulless and greedy. And with it came the end of the initial illusions: the myth of German correctness was soon brought to naught. The change in the mood of the French people was mainly prompted by three important facts. First of all, they had hoped and believed that at least the war would be over and done with: their sons would come back home, and the refugees from Northern France would return to their empty and

battered houses to rebuild their homes and their lives and to start work again. But the armistice laid it down that the French prisoners of war—more than a million, both in Germany and in the occupied zone—were not to be set free. So this hope was dashed. (Let us not forget that the prisoners of war remain one of the most effective instruments of blackmail in German hands.) The home-coming of the refugees, too, was prevented by the Germans closing the frontiers between the occupied and the free zone for weeks on end; and even when it was opened, only small batches, according to a certain scheme of priorities, were allowed to cross it. Moreover all men of military age in occupied territory were threatened with internment in labour camps; this created widespread alarm, and even caused the authorities in unoccupied France to stop the demobilisation for a while, as they did not want to throw on the streets too many idle and destitute men who would not or could not return to their homes.

Secondly, there was all the annoyance connected with the ruthless machinery which the Nazis soon set working to extract as thoroughly as possible the spoils of victory. Apart even from the economic effects of the

wholesale plundering of France's wealth, this was utterly repugnant to the French population. The French peasant and tradesman had always been an individualist. He disliked having to stand in queues for a slip of paper which gave him permission (as one burly farmer put it) to milk his cows. He disliked being dictated to and told what to do and, more often, what not to do with his own things. He intensely disliked being ordered about in his own shop or on his own land.

The third and most important factor of all was the growing shortage of food. Hunger kills all reason, but before they get to that stage, an empty stomach sometimes makes people think. In fact, it was the growing discomfort of their daily life which first set people in France thinking about what had happened. They gradually realised what they had lost. In occupied France they came to know and to hate the Nazis. In unoccupied France they came to understand that a dictatorship means less freedom as well as less bread.

The fate of Paris under German domination is sufficiently known to the world mainly through reports in the American Press; very little is known about the situation in the remainder of the occupied region.

Amongst all the stories from Paris I have read there is no one summarising more briefly the doings of the "occupying Power" than this little item which appeared in a very cautiously framed report in a French (Vichy) paper: The big department stores in Paris are in the main empty, the principal customers being German officers. The other day one of these bought in one store three hundred pairs of ladies' silk stockings. He paid the handsome price in brand-new notes. Three short sentences—and what a story of arrogance and looting! You see the German soldiers drinking champagne on the terraces of the famous cafés in the Champs Elysées. You see Hitler desecrating the tomb of Napoleon. You see Nazi women coming to Paris to buy nice things and to have a good rest from the bombing of the R.A.F. And you need not even be told by experts how, by arbitrarily fixing the exchange rate of the mark, by printing heaps of French currency notes and by collecting precious goods for worthless bits of paper, the Germans effectively confiscated France's stocks and wantonly pillaged her wealth. The biggest lumps of their loot were indeed paid for by various forms of credit notes to be cashed—after the war.

HUNGER AHEAD

My own personal experiences are limited to the non-occupied zone. Here the most alarming feature at first was an incredible disorganisation. The influx of refugees and of the retreating French army completely upset the life of this otherwise peaceful region and threw the administration entirely out of gear; it also quickly drained its rich resources. All available stocks were soon cleared, the army consuming most of them, while the officers continued to live carefree. They could not be replenished owing to the complete breakdown of transport. Thus, while in one town the shops were entirely empty and indeed a whole district looked as if it had been visited by locusts, the neighbouring Département, which, by chance, had been less desperately overcrowded, might still be fairly well supplied; but there was no remedy for this orgy of dislocated distribution.

The first commodity to disappear entirely was petrol; requisitioning and strict rationing came too late to bring back the quantities which had been wasted, during the first weeks, by officers and their orderlies on pleasure drives with women or on entirely

unnecessary errands, when they had driven many miles to buy delicacies where these were still to be had. Now you could see people—mostly refugees—with tin-cans begging in vain at the pump-stations for a little petrol to feed their cooking-stoves (for gas was also scarce); others invented all sorts of novel fuels, including sawdust, which they pressed into little iron stoves.

Butter and eggs also disappeared. Oil, the staple-fat of the South, became very scarce, as also other fats and soap and cheese and coffee. Naturally, hoarding set in as well as profiteering, in spite of price-control for essential commodities. Shops opened for only a few hours a day to hand out to endless queues of customers the rare goods they had somehow contrived to obtain. In most shop-windows there were inscriptions: "Not open till . . ." or "We have not in stock . . ." followed by a long list of all the most coveted articles. Shopkeepers became ill-humoured and haughty; there were interesting studies to be made of how the changed relation between supply and demand reacted upon the relations between a worshipful grocer and his customers. For the month of August the official rations in the Département where I lived were about 9 oz. of macaroni and

less than 4 oz. of rice per month per head. Bread was only to be sold stale. Even the *apéritif*, the symbol of France's easy days, did not escape restriction, and particular resentment was aroused by imposing closed hours for cafés and restaurants during the day.

If all this was hard to bear for the local population who knew their tradespeople and still had many ways to fill their larder, it was harder still for the refugees, and especially for the foreigners. They had been received at first with generous hospitality, which went out to all refugees, Frenchmen and foreigners alike. Now unfriendly remarks could frequently be heard from both shopkeepers and local customers. Want breeds hostility and, for the foreigner, humiliation was added to hunger. In the end, the problem of the refugees—Frenchmen, Belgians and foreigners—became a nightmare.

In the case of foreigners, a régime like that of Vichy was bound to seek a solution simply in police methods. Lock them up! that is the only way the authoritarian bureaucrat can think of. In fact, some of the Departments started internment measures of their own, to be followed later by that ignominious decree of the Vichy Government which

authorised the internment of all foreigners, if they became "a danger to order and national security". Particularly bad was the position in the border districts, like Limoges, where the French refugees intent on going home, but who had been held up by the closing of the frontier between the two zones, had eaten up all supplies; or in Marseilles, where tens of thousands of foreigners had been attracted by the foreign Consulates and the vain hope of a visa and a ship. A moving story could be written about the sorry trek of these tens of thousands, who, after the flow of refugees from the North had settled down in Southern France, were soon again on the move, hunted by callousness and haunted by fear, down to the shores of the sea. But there were no ships, and only a few got visas and were able to move on, often in great hardship, trickling in a thin streamlet over the mountains into Spain and from there on to Lisbon and to freer shores. The majority got stuck in Marseilles, and the police swooped down on them and arrested them at random and interned them indiscriminately. Certain internment camps in Southern France had never been emptied or were now refilled. Amongst the worst treated were foreign refugees who had pre-

viously been in Belgium and whose only crime consisted in that they had fled to France in great confusion when Hitler invaded Belgium. There were thousands of them in two great camps, St. Cyprien and the Camp du Vernet, ill-famed, sordid places of tragic memories: they had served before to embrace with barbed wire the unfortunate Spanish Republicans when they fled into France.

Worst of all, the situation of the German and Austrian anti-Nazi exiles grew truly desperate. They felt caught in a mouse-trap; France, to them, became inferno. Indeed, France, the country to which they had looked for freedom and protection from Nazi persecution; to which they had come for shelter from monstrous brutality, which they had trusted and loved—France now turned against them. They had been interned in concentration camps in Germany. They had been, on the outbreak of war, interned in France, and again interned when the German conquest of Norway and Holland roused hatred and kindled distrust. They were now interned for the fourth time. They, the tried opponents of Hitler, had been interned once because they were, after all, German subjects and you could not trust

them; they were now interned because they were still German subjects and their presence might offend Hitler. They had once been suspected of Nazi sympathies; they had now become a liability because they were anti-Nazis.

And German control commissions including SS-men and Gestapo officials visited the internment camps, and German political refugees, especially non-Jews, were closely questioned about their antecedents, and why they were there, and whether they wanted to return to Germany, and if not, for what reason. Some were obviously marked down for later extradition.

German control, indeed. All the time the grip of the Nazis upon unoccupied France tightened. The armistice gave them the right to send commissions to inspect the carrying out of various provisions: demobilisation of the French army, storing and dismantling of aircraft, handing over of army stocks, liberation of German prisoners of war, and the like. In a little town a baker told me how on calling at the French intendance (military supply office) he met two gentlemen in mufti who spoke perfect French and seemed very well informed about his army contracts; indeed, they asked to be shown his flour

reserves. They were Germans taking stock of the available food supplies.

The control extended in some places to a virtual occupation by a host of German officers and armed detachments. Their presence held out to the French population the dreary prospects of the times to come: more plundering, more tightening of the belt and possibly German occupation.

Their life is misery now. It is hunger ahead. Will it be starvation next year?

But I will not conclude this chapter on a note of despair. I will, as I have done before, register the little signs which speak to us of the real feelings and the true hopes of the French people. A friend of mine had the opportunity to accompany a French waterworks' engineer on a tour of inspection through a rural district; on this occasion he met a score of country people from little villages and remote farms. One of the farmers said to him: "We pray for the British." A neighbour concurred with a nod; but, proud of the anti-clerical tradition of the rural South, he added: "If we could pray, we would . . ."

The Socialist *Maire* of a tiny village, with due solemnity, went to his desk and, taking a sheet of paper out of the drawer, showed

them a resolution which his council had voted at a meeting he had recently convened. It was—oh, eternal France!—couched in about these terms: “We, the *Maire* and the councillors of X., have noted with satisfaction that Marshal Pétain has taken the lead in the country’s hour of trial. We trust, however, and we demand of him that the new constitution and the new Government shall be inspired by the fundamental principles of the Republic and shall respect the inalienable liberties of the people . . .” This document they had duly signed, *Maire* and councillors, and sent to Pétain. My friend was deeply moved. “My dear man,” he said to the *Maire*, “either you are fools or you are heroes.”

And an old farmer, bearing his eighty years and wearing the long linen shirt of the old-time peasantry, said in his old-time pathetic French: “Those of Vichy want to kill the Republic. But they can’t kill it in our hearts.”

These are the people of France. I could go on telling of little incidents where even a French general or a French gendarme would show himself kind-hearted and helpful towards women or children or wretched refugees. The same experience repeated

itself over and over again: the individual Frenchman is a good-natured, polite and highly intelligent person; the French official institutions were soulless and rotten. A century and a half of history which started with the Revolution had made the French individual a free citizen and a thinking, cultured man. A century and a half had made the French bourgeois State a corrupt and exhausted institution. The State collapsed, but the citizens go on. The institutions changed for the worse, and they have got to be renewed once more. The liberty-loving men are there. France lives on.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROSPECTS

THE FUTURE OF FRANCE

BEFORE leaving the simple farmhouse where we had found, during troubled weeks, a little rest and a touching hospitality, I bade farewell to the farmer, his wife and her mother. The man, a bricklayer by trade, had been through the war; he had come back, one night, after his unit had disbanded in the fray. He invited us to a farewell dinner, and the meal these plain, modest people gave us was as good as their conversation was friendly and interesting. It touched upon the further prospects of the war, and I was trying to find out how he felt about it. I knew the English, I said, they were a tough lot; would it not impress the French people when they saw that Britain was fighting on?

“The English,” said my little French farmer; “people say they have not sent enough troops. But, after all, have they not been right—after what we have had from our generals? They knew better than we did . . .”

These words stuck in my mind when I took leave.

And this other story will be my last. A German Socialist refugee, a fearless underground worker, had been surprised by the Nazis when they steam-rolled into the Low Countries. His wife was arrested; he had to make his way through the German lines, touching death by a hair's breadth a dozen times and seeing and learning a lot during his dangerous, crouching escape. When he reached the French lines, however, he was arrested, and again it was touch and go whether he would be shot as a spy. Finally it was decided that he should be interned, and he was marched off, together with other refugees, under military escort. This man, who had many times risked his life in the fight against Hitler, who had blown up bridges to stem the Nazi advance and done more than three French Divisions, was fuming with indignation. As he could speak hardly a word of French, he got hold of another refugee and, accosting one of their French guards, asked the man to translate a few sentences, plain and blunt:

"I am a German anti-Nazi. I have done this and that. I am also an international Socialist. I stand for the solidarity of all

workers, French and German, as I stand against Hitler . . .”

Thereupon, the French soldier threw his rifle aside, took him by the hand, kissed him, called his comrades and his officer and argued with them until my friend was set free.

These two little incidents seem to me to indicate the lines on which the future of France will move.

Whatever the Vichy Government may concede to Nazi pressure; whatever humiliations they may accept; whatever concessions, territorial and moral, they may make; whatever shameful help they may give to France's conqueror against her former allies—the French people will not fight against the British. They may be deluded, or induced under duress, to put up with more dishonourable deals—they will not go to war against Britain. Why, the French soldiers did not even want to fight against “the boches”; never will they consent to fight for them.

On the other hand, there are forces in France, hidden away under the dreariness of imposed duty and the drudgery of everyday life, which make for a change in the future. These are the forces of the working

man and the peasant, of the common people. They are subdued to-day; they are chafing and hoping. And they will greet the first British soldier who sets foot on French soil again, just as his escort kissed my German friend.

To-day they are waiting—merely waiting. It would be a delusion to think that in France revolution is round the corner. True, the grip of the Nazi fist will tighten. The strain on France's national feelings, the blots on her national pride will increase. The pressure of her own dictatorial Government will grow. With her industry throttled, her economic life nearly strangled, her labour harnessed to toil for the conqueror, her soil exhausted to feed the insatiable greed of the Germans, her own needs will be increasingly neglected and she will feel the pinching pains of hunger. She will grow restive and rebellious.

But the Nazi bayonets are upon her. The rulers of Vichy, growing more authoritarian as they go on bowing to Hitler and being despised for it, may soon resort to terror; they will no longer be content to arrest former political leaders, but will start filling their prisons with opponents from the rank and file. Tremendous mass unemployment

will make people tremble for their livelihood. The still unsolved problems of the French refugees, returning from chaos to ruins, and of the prisoners of war, destined to return from prison to bondage—these will add to the confusion, but they will also be used to keep the people cowed. Under these conditions the French people, just as they will not go to war again, are not likely to stand up to their oppressors. There will be no French war against Britain. But there will be no early revolution in France.

Some Conservatives, much as they abhor revolutions, have a way of expecting them just when it suits their own nationalist ends. They did their best to come to terms with Hitler in order to keep things as they are; now they grow impatient with the masses on the Continent because they will not yet start overthrowing the Nazi régime. The same people pampered Mussolini; they helped Franco to win his war against the Spanish people and slaughter hundreds of thousands of men who fought for a free and independent Spain. Now that Franco is about to fall into line behind his German and Italian masters, these people look to what they used to call "the Red rabble", the martyred Spanish democrats and workers, to start

anew a nice civil war. These people backed the corrupt rulers of Poland and the Royal fascist régime in Rumania; in fact they have supported and pretended to trust every reactionary régime in Europe; and now that they reap the harvest of weeds they sowed, now that they are obliged to realise that they have always backed the wrong horse, they turn round in astonishment and blame not themselves, but the people they helped to betray and keep down.

We have a better right than these people to talk about revolutions—but we also know better than they that revolutions are not child's play. It is true that military defeat commonly makes for revolution in the defeated country. That held good in 1918, but it has been belied this time in France. It failed to work because of the existence of a new and overpowering factor: Nazi-Fascism. There was no revolution in vanquished France, because there was Hitler. And there will be no revolution in France as long as Hitler's might is unbroken.

Nor will there be revolution in Belgium, or Holland, or Norway, in Denmark, Poland, Czechoslovakia or Austria—least of all in Germany—until the military power of the Nazis is shaken and their hold on the

enslaved peoples weakens. Then, and not till then, will these nations rise against the yoke.

Two obvious conclusions follow. Firstly: there is no hope for the recovery of freedom anywhere without a military victory over Hitler. Every fighter against oppression, every Socialist, every revolutionary, much as he may long for greater freedom, must bear this in mind.

Secondly: it is vain to hope for an isolated national upheaval either in France or elsewhere. The time will come for striking from within at the diminished power of the Nazis and their vassals once it has been shaken by a military reverse. But even then an isolated national revolution could be only a beginning: it will not be decisive, indeed it may not even stand a chance of a local success, unless it quickly spreads. Under the monstrous might of the powers that govern our epoch the time for national revolutions is rapidly passing: revolution has become an international, or at least a European issue. The fate of France is intimately linked with that of the whole Continent.

FRANCE AND EUROPE

This interrelation of interests, hopes and destinies is no new problem. Yet it has assumed an entirely new aspect under the crushing weight of Fascism and under the driving urge of war.

Hitler today dominates the whole of the European Continent from the arctic shores of Norway down to the orange groves of Spain, and from Brittany to the Black Sea. He has united Europe in bondage.

France is but a link in this chain, but a very important one. France had been, on the Continent, the cradle of liberty. France had been, along with Great Britain, but with a different rhythm in her evolution, the motherland of democracy. Once she had been the torch-bearer in the progress of humanity, and the leader of bourgeois civilisation and culture. In bringing France to heel, Hitler has done more than defeat a strong opponent. He has crushed a symbol. He has trampled upon the torch.

It does not matter that this torch had lately been little more than a miserable, fading candle giving little light and no warmth at all—still, it shone. You may have noticed that in a dark night the faintest

ray will be seen for miles: this is an apt analogy to the European blackout. Freedom may have been a neglected tradition in France, Liberalism a worn-out creed, corrupted by Capitalism, reduced by reaction, abandoned by treachery and cowardice. Still, it is no small event that Nazism, at the head of its mechanised columns, has been able to make its triumphant entry into the City of Light, where every street from the Place de la Bastille to the Arc de Triomphe is a page of history and every stone has its glorious tradition. Well, indeed, may Hitler boast that he has mastered and smitten pluto-democracy in one of its capitals.

Moreover, France had also been a great European Power and a world Power of the first rank. After the last war she was the dominant Power on the Continent. She revealed the intrinsic weakness of her ruling class when she was unable, at Versailles, to build up a durable European order or, after Versailles, to maintain even the doubtful order she had helped to create. At Munich, when she sacrificed her Eastern allies to the German drive for conquest, she abdicated her European position. Still she maintained what seemed a tremendous military power as well as a wide-flung Empire. It is no

small thing, again, that this power should be gone. Well, indeed, may Hitler now dream of creating a new European order.

Today he stands astride the Continent, from the Atlantic coast to the Balkan shores. He has, as we said, united Europe in an enormous prison. He has also united it in hunger.

In fact, the German war-economy has taken on itself the task of feeding a whole Continent, after having plundered its resources. It feeds the nations of Europe from its soup kitchen on mouldy bread and siege rations. This new development will demonstrate to hundreds of millions, who previously did not trouble to think about it, that Fascism means not merely making workers work again (you remember my French bourgeois talking about it!) and putting those nasty Reds into concentration camps; that it means not only the loss of rights and forced labour, not only violence and war—but that Fascism also means famine. This demonstration is made not by politicians in Parliament or on the platform, but by the irrefutable evidence of daily life and dwindling daily bread. You need not be a Socialist; you need not have cared for politics at all; you may be the dullest of

country yokels or the laziest of fashionable idlers: you cannot escape the teaching you get.

And this teaching is: Fascism is an international agency, and it has internationalised your personal life as well as your nation's fate to a degree hitherto unknown in history. It has done this for evil—it is up to you to make internationalisation turn to the good.

Hitler's victory over France has succeeded in internationalising every issue: war and victory, famine and freedom. The extension of Nazi domination means the extension of the area of hunger; it means the extension of the area of potential revolution. But neither hunger nor revolution is a national issue any more. There is, after Hitler's reign of unifying terror, no national solution for the problem of food nor yet for the problem of freedom.

Hitler in France has accomplished Europe's unity in defeat. He has made many nations curse the same scourge and pray to the same star. He has cemented their common destiny—in darkness today, in victory tomorrow.

FROM DEFEAT TO VICTORY

This European unity, forged in the agonies of war, is two-edged. It unifies today the Continent in destruction and in distress, in surrender and in serfdom. At the same time it unifies what is left of Europe's former self, of its treasured forms of life and liberty, in Britain. She, too, is today no longer a nation by herself, fighting for her own narrow, national ends. England is England still, but she is also the rest of Europe. She incorporates what is left of Europe's civilisation. This is a momentous mission which has fallen upon her shoulders, a great honour as well as a tremendous duty. May Britain's free men and women live up to their European task!

Now we have noted that, given the present situation of a Europe unified under brutal force, the only way of achieving the change unto a Europe, united and free, is to assure the military defeat of her evil master. This war must be won, Hitler's military power must be crushed. At the same time it is evident that this task has become much harder since Hitler's power stretches from Boulogne to the Balkans. Victory on the battlefields, victory by 'planes and bombs

there must be, but it is obviously much more difficult to achieve this victory since Hitler commands the Channel and strikes at the Dardanelles. Therefore, military strategy must be supplemented by other means of warfare: this war will not be won by military means alone.

This has been said over and over again by men much more qualified than myself to get a hearing. My intention is merely to show how the lesson of France leads once more to the same conclusion.

France, as a nation, threw away her power because her rulers, as a class, strove with their little minds to preserve their possessions; they feared the bogey of bolshevism more than the danger of Fascism. France has lost the war because her rulers relied solely on military defences and rejected the very idea of a political war. They did not believe that a battle-cry that would rouse the masses could be worth many divisions; they did not realise that an idea can lead men to attack and win a battle. Having themselves no ideals, they did not want an army inspired by higher thoughts than theirs; living themselves in comfort, they did not understand that men who live in poverty will die for a hope.

Afraid of ideas, terrified lest the fight for freedom might gain in momentum and move on beyond the boundaries of their old and creaking order, they said "No" to the means that could have won the war. It was their stubborn refusal of an ideological war which led to their abject surrender. Putting class before country, they have destroyed their nation's greatness. They have wasted the historic heritage of France, thrown away her Empire and flung her people into the abyss.

This war, then, must be a political war. It must be an ideological war against Fascism and for freedom. It must be a total war, excluding no means, rejecting no friendly forces, bringing up the vast reserves of will and strength which lie unused in the hearts of the toiling masses, releasing their hopes, rousing their energies to fight and work for a new and better world. And it must be a fight to the finish: to break up and crush Fascism and do away with dictatorship. No slackening, no faltering, no flinching—no fear that the forces that fight for the future may go too far in their will to freedom. You cannot beat Hitler by holding back whatever energies there are ready to be mobilised against him. You

can only assure the triumph of your cause by making it as wide as the nation, the world and humanity, pregnant with the future, greater and bolder still!

In the case of France, as in the case of any other nation which has fallen a prey to the Fascist lust for power, this means linking up your cause—our cause—with the sufferings and hopes of the down-trodden masses. There must be no reliance on those of her corrupt rulers who took the last boat to come over, after wrecking the ship from which they ratted: they offer you nothing but their conservative outlook and their desire to retain the surroundings and limitations of their class. Do not pin your faith, in France, on discredited politicians or cautious backers of two horses: they may promise support, but they have deserted once, and they may shirk and betray you once more. For allies in France you must look to the common people, to the unknown men, to the nameless fighters of the future. They will repudiate with disgust the infamous formula of their present rulers: "loyal to the conqueror". They will be loyal to their friends.

Let us, for one moment, bring down this vision to more practical possibilities.

Imagine the British landing force, after the R.A.F. has beaten back and weakened the Germans and the Navy has cleared the Channel, going ashore at various points of the French coast. It might be useful, then, if influential people, the Prefect and the Bishop and a general, dared to come forward promptly and rally to the cause. It will be far more useful that the Tommies should be helped—as indeed they will be—by the fishermen and the farmers and the village priest. It is far more important that they should find shelter in modest homes and guides on local footpaths and volunteers to bring information and carry messages through the German lines. And the workers in the neighbouring town will down tools, and the German garrisons will be surrounded by hatred and hostility; their lines of communication will be cut and their rear threatened and their morale shaken. And the common people of France will rejoice and spread the message of coming liberation, and there will be many thousands eager to take up arms again and to fight in the common cause. Which cause? It is as plain and simple as these people's soul: they will hail you and help you and fight with you if you come not only to drive the

invaders out, not only to restore the Rights of Man, but to assure and enlarge them.

Is this a fantastic vision? It may yet come true. When the day comes, I don't know about France's politicians. I know about her people.

Were I preposterous enough to think I had made, in recording France's tragedy, a little contribution to her future resurrection, I would dedicate this book to the glorious memory of those who fell in fighting Fascism; to all my comrades in the cause of greater freedom; and to my many friends amongst the common people of France.

It is their fate that preys on my mind. It is their faith I share and their hope I hold dear. I trust to see them again, united in a Europe free from Fascism and bound together in greater liberty. I called this modest book: "Farewell, France". But this, in French, can be translated in two ways. You say: Adieu, if it is a parting for good. If you are sure to meet again, you say to your friends: Au revoir.